

IT BEGAN WITH A WEDDING" by Mrs. Baillie Reynold

SMITH'S

MAGAZINE

OCT. 1918

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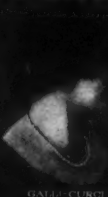
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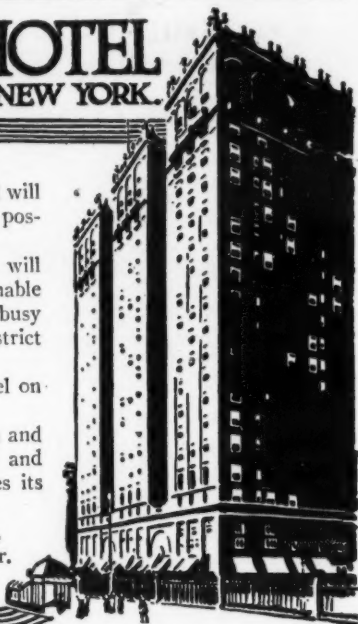
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SMITH'S MAGAZINE

Volume 28

OCTOBER, 1918

Number 1

It Began with a Wedding

By Mrs. Baillie Reynolds

Author of "The Lonely Stronghold," "The Daughter Pays," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT A. GRAEF

Following a quarrel with the girl he loves, Rolf Holderness suddenly marries a young girl he doesn't love and barely knows. The results of this strange war wedding are told in this thrilling story by a brilliant English writer.

CHAPTER I.

THE church was crowded, for the Bowdens had a large circle of acquaintances, and even though war weddings are rather a drug in the market, everybody felt he must come and see Chrissie married.

There was to be no reception, for it was not more than six months since the bride's brother had been killed in action, but various members of the congregation were to be informally bidden to repair to the house after the ceremony, to wish the young couple God-speed.

The seats assigned to the bridegroom's friends were but sparsely occupied. In one of them sat a woman whose attire and general air of eccentricity made her noticeable. She leaned over the front of her pew toward a man of the same species—a man with a lean face, a saturnine mouth, and half-closed eyes which saw everything.

"Hello, Blitz," she murmured. "The sight of you here is as incongruous as it is refreshing. For pity's sake, tell me what Rolf is doing in the camp of the Philistines?"

IS

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Imperiling his immortal soul, I should say, by taking vows that there's not the smallest chance of his keeping," said he, speaking more seriously than was his wont, as could be seen from the glance of aroused attention flung at him by Miss Jane Lockett.

"Then it was true," she murmured, "what they were saying about him in Paris?"

"I haven't a notion what they were saying about him in Paris."

"That he'd been badly turned down by Eleanor Carmichael."

"As a matter of fact, I happen to know that that is true."

"Were they engaged?"

"They became engaged at my studio, when Rolf last was home on leave. She broke it off about two months ago."

"Do you know why?"

Evidently Blitz did. He hesitated a moment.

"They quarreled," he said presently.

"On account of this girl—the bride?"

"Lord love you, no! Well, if you will have it, because Eleanor was flirting furiously with Max Ritter."

"Max Ritter! I thought he was interned?"

"So he was. But not for long. Got a member of Parliament to go surety for him. Well, you know Rolf Holderness. It must be all or nothing with him. He sent her an ultimatum and got the order of the boot by return of post."

"And this is the result? Oh, Blitz, it's bad, it's bad! What's a girl about, to take such a deadly risk?"

The man shrugged his shoulders in a hopeless kind of way.

"He got back on his leave yesterday, and went to see Eleanor on his way from Waterloo. If he hadn't found Max there, I believe this wedding would never have come off."

"Do you suppose the other girl knows?"

"I shouldn't think she's ever heard of Eleanor. Have you seen her? I caught a glimpse of her once when he was last on leave, before any of this happened. She's so young that, if she were one minute younger, she wouldn't be born at all."

"Oh, Blitz!" sighed Jane once more.

Two elderly ladies seated near turned round and glared upon the two who talked in church. Almost at the same minute, Rolf Holderness, followed by a friend in khaki, came out of the vestry and took up his position at the chancel gate. He was absolutely white—so white as to be livid—and Jane could hardly repress a groan. The choir boys tuned up "The Voice That Breathed o'er Eden," and little Chrissie came up the church on her father's arm. Her wistful eyes looked unnaturally big, set off by her dark curls and the white folds of tulle that floated over her shoulders, finished in front by a tiny garland of white buds. The two artists who looked on were simultaneously reminded of a lamb that has lost its mother. She wore the conventional marriage garb, but there was something in her face that was far from conven-

tional. Her brown hair was warm with rich bronze lights, her eyes so dark a gray that at night they might have been black. The tint of her skin was lovely, a golden white; and her nervous excitement had brought a flush of delicate carmine to each cheek.

The service was soon over, and the irrevocable accomplished. The time occupied in signing the register was very brief. Soon the pair were coming down the gangway of the nave, and acknowledging the greetings of their friends.

The stony misery of Rolf's expression was not, to most of those present, a thing to wonder at. The majority of British bridegrooms hide a very real satisfaction under a like mask. People merely took him to be nervous. But, as he approached the place where the tall, gaunt man whom Jane Lockett called Blitz stood with folded arms, a light dawned upon the blankness of the well-cut features.

"Blitz, old man, this is good! Jane Lockett too!" He bent toward the girl on his arm. "Chrissie, this is my friend, Blundell—a great man. We studied together under Levargue. And Miss Lockett, who always gave us breakfast when we had no money left."

The usual greetings appropriate under the circumstance were interchanged, and the little bride shyly suggested that Mr. Blundell and Miss Lockett should come to Cadogan Crescent and help cut the cake.

With the idea of making things easier for Rolf, they both accepted, in spite of their reluctance to enter the camp of the Philistines; and Holderness, pleased and a little surprised at their acceptance, passed on.

As they reached the last row of seats, in the shadow of an old gallery, two people who had been seated there rose and came up to them. Chrissie felt her husband start as he came to a standstill. There faced them a tall woman, with large, vague blue eyes and a mouth



The stony misery of Rolf's expression was not, to most of those present, a thing to wonder at. People merely took him to be nervous.

fuller than is usual in the English type of beauty. Her throat was long, white, and columnar, like a Rossetti picture, and her golden hair drifted under her oddly shaped hat and into her eyes. To the Bowdens' acquaintances, who filled the church, she was like a caricature, but she had a subtle beauty that, in the eyes of many men, was only enhanced by the extravagance of her style.

"A thousand felicitations, Rolf, darling," she said softly; and the man at her elbow smiled detestably, as Chrissie thought, and echoed:

"A thousand felicitations."

"Hello, Ritter! Have they let you out?" said Rolf, his usually kind voice so charged with venom that Chris started.

"Let me out? You speak as if I'd been doing time," was the light response; to which Holderness swiftly retorted:

"Well, haven't you?"

"Rolf, forget old grudges on the happiest day of your life," said Eleanor Carmichael earnestly, showing flawless teeth behind the brilliant rose color of her moist lips. "Max, as you must know, was only interned by mistake."

"A very natural mistake," flashed back Rolf smoothly. "Let me introduce my wife—Herr Ritter."

A menacing darkness passed over Eleanor's blue eyes, but she was evidently not going to lose her temper.

"Your husband was always droll," said she to the mystified Chrissie. "Since when has Max become 'Herr Ritter,' Rolf?"

"Since August, 1914," snapped Rolf. "Come, Chrissie."

Eleanor pushed him back, grasping the bride's hand.

"I haven't so much as spoken to her," she cried protestingly, "and I want her to promise to come and see me when your leave is over and she is all alone."

"Oh, she won't be alone. She has

plenty of friends," was the barely civil reply, and Rolf moved onward with determination as he spoke.

The congregation had now left their places, and were surging behind them into the gangway, so no further words were possible.

A moment later, the newly wed couple found themselves in a brougham with a pair of horses, being driven back to Cadogan Crescent.

CHAPTER II.

Chrissie was the youngest of the three Miss Bowdens, and the quiet one.

She was but eighteen when war broke out, so she had, as it were, missed her girlhood—no balls, no trips abroad, no Oxford Commemoration, such as her sisters had had. One of her brothers had fallen in the struggle—her own specially beloved brother Sid.

It was Sid who had brought Captain Holderness to the house in Cadogan Crescent. Rolf Holderness belonged to the vast class of patriotic young Englishmen who volunteered the moment war was declared, in spite of being totally unsuited to a military life. He was a painter of real ability and was beginning to make a name for himself. He disliked the army routine and was out of sympathy with the cheery young Philistines who were his fellow officers. Sid Bowden was the only one with whom he made friends, for Sid, besides being a Philistine, was a wit, and his unflagging hilarity had carried Holderness through some bad bouts of depression.

The two young men, by an unusual accident, got leaves simultaneously, and, as Holderness' people were in Spain, he received a cordial invitation to come to Sid's home.

When he came, he was a good deal disconcerted by the frank, Victorian obviousness of the whole household. Mrs. Bowden and her daughters made surgi-

cal dressings, washed dishes in can-tees, and acted as V. A. D. nurses. Chrissie, at the time of Sid's leave, was, to her own joy, taking a vacation by doctor's orders, as the result of overwork. Upon her, therefore, devolved the duty of "amusing the boys," and she found Holderness, though handsome enough to fascinate her, very hard to interest. An officer who loathed revues and could not see the fun of having tea at the Piccadilly Hotel was a genus to which she was so far quite a stranger.

He went out by himself a good deal, having friends in town. Somehow Chrissie gathered that he did not introduce his friends to her people because he knew the two sets would not fuse. Holderness was quite polite, always, but Chrissie was constrained to believe that it was an effort to him to seem interested in the family, and that his thoughts were often far away.

He made enough impression upon her inexperienced heart for her to be very anxious to get on better with him. She tried to take an interest in pictures, but she was much cast down at finding that Holderness loathed those that she admired, and vice versa. There was a large photogravure of "The Soul's Awakening" upon the dining-room wall in Cadogan Crescent, flanked by one of Maud Gooding's pictures, in which various infants in long petticoats were posturing aimlessly about like an advertisement for a children's outfitting establishment. In a moment of expansion, Holderness did confide to the large-eyed, eager little simpleton of a Chrissie that he had maneuvered to sit with his back to these works of art because the sight of them took away his appetite.

Often, after his departure, she wondered why.

They had, in her opinion, made no progress at all in intimacy when he returned to the front. In fact, during the last few days of his stay, he had seemed

altogether distraught and as if he hardly knew whether she was in the room or out of it. But when he was leaving, he thanked her for being so good to him, and said he would appreciate a letter now and then.

Chrissie was willing enough to comply. In consequence of repeated bad colds, she left off V.A.D-ing that spring, and took to making socks and slippers and sand bags, which could be done indoors. This left her a little leisure and she employed it in studying such works of art as the fear of air raids has left visible in London. To her satisfaction, she found her own standards of criticism beginning to change. Bitter phrases, let drop by Holderness, clung in her memory and served for guides. She read "Modern Painters." How horrified Rolf was when she told him so in a letter! But, in spite of his scolding, the burning words of Ruskin did open a door in her intelligence. They taught her actually to see the things she looked at, and she began to develop.

It was soon after that that Sid was killed. Holderness was with him to the last, and wrote letters to the Bowdens that showed him at his very best—many sympathetic letters that were more comfort to the starving heart of Sid's little sister than even her brother's being mentioned in dispatches.

Another six months rolled by, and then, out of a clear sky, as it were, fell the bombshell of a surprise. Holderness wrote to say that in a few weeks' time he would have a fortnight's leave. Would Chrissie marry him, as early in the fortnight as it could be arranged?

"You were always a good little pal," he wrote, "and I feel that I badly need a pal just now. I think Sid would be very pleased, don't you?"

Chrissie was utterly astonished, but it appeared that her family were not.

"Always thought he was sweet on you," remarked her sister Connie. "A



"I haven't given you a wedding present. Let me give you a portrait of your wife," said Blundell; and Chrissie, to her amazement, saw her husband positively stammer as he tried to voice his thanks.

man like that loves some one who listens to him with her soul in her eyes, as if he were a chapter out of the Bible."

Thus reassured, Chrissie wrote and said "Yes."

"I was surprised," ran her innocent reply. "I always thought you looked upon me as a little duffer. I used to feel so silly, somehow, when you were here. But I'm really not quite so empty-minded as I was. I've read every book on the list you gave me, and some of them I've liked very much, though in each of them I've only understood about a quarter."

After that, things rushed onward like a stream approaching a cataract. Letters between them were chiefly occupied with discussions as to the date of the wedding, where they should spend their brief honeymoon, and what should become of Chrissie when Rolf went back to France.

The actual return of the bridegroom, though it found most things prepared by the capable Bowden family, found the bride quite unprepared. She had altered considerably since Holderness had last seen her. The death of Sid—her joyous, rollicking Sid—had left a deep wound in her affectionate heart. Joined to this was her mental development, under the guiding influence of a love so shy that it might be better described as an intellectual admiration.

When the day of Rolf's return was as certain as the vagaries of the war office permitted, she worked herself into a fever of suspense. She and her sister Constance went to meet the leave train, waited two hours at the terminus, and missed their man in the crowd. They hurried back home, thinking that they might find him there, but he had not arrived at Cadogan Crescent, and they were actually discussing the propriety of sending out notices that the wedding was postponed when he made his appearance, between eight and nine

o'clock in the evening. He seemed vexed that they should have attempted to meet him, and said he had been obliged to go and see his lawyer about his will, the marriage settlement, and so on.

Chrissie was herself in such an agony of nerves, and so wrought up, that she had no leisure to judge his mood. He talked more, she thought—faster and in a harder voice than she remembered. But he owned to being dead beat, and said he would not feel like himself until he had had a good night's rest.

Mrs. Bowden did not think it *comme il faut* that he should stay in their house, and had taken him a room in a hotel near. It seemed to Chrissie that he had hardly greeted them all and discussed arrangements a little before he excused himself and went off to "sleep it out," making an appointment to turn up at eleven the following day—the one before the wedding—to take Chrissie to buy a ring and make some other purchases.

The appointment he duly kept, and was shown into the dining room, where he found Chrissie alone, busy unpacking some gifts that had just arrived.

The display of these to him, and the effort to make him understand whence they came, tided her over the first shock of awkwardness. But after a few minutes she was left hanging, as it were, in the wind, longing for some word from him that might unlock the gates of her maiden aloofness and give her an excuse to tell him how dearly she loved him.

Rolf himself broke the pause. He had been sitting for some minutes in absorbed contemplation of "The Soul's Awakening." Suddenly he turned and spoke, but without looking at Chrissie:

"Well, little woman, we haven't got time to make friends, have we? Still less to make love. We must wait until we are—until we are together, and then begin at the beginning. I—we—it has

struck me, don't you think we'd better go and take rooms at the Metropole, and see if we can get a couple of stalls at the Garrick for to-morrow night? That'll save traveling, which is beastly just now, and of which I've had all I want. We won't tell anybody what we mean to do, or where we are going, eh?"

As Chrissie remained silent, he looked up to mark the effect of his words. She sat simply enough, the other side of the big dining table, gazing upon him.

"Is that what you'd like to do?" she asked.

Rolf suddenly knew that she was changed. This was not the pretty flapper he had left, but a graver, older, more reflecting Chrissie. He was not quite sure he liked the change.

"Oh, of course it is a question of what *you* want to do," he said quickly.

"Only give me an idea——"

"Really, I don't think we can improve on yours."

"Honest?"

She nodded. Tears were so near that she could not speak, but of this he had no inkling.

"Then that's settled." He stood up with an air of relief. "Trot along and put a hat on, won't you?"

So they went shopping and bought a ring—much too full of big diamonds to please Chrissie, but she dared not say so, seeing that Rolf assumed it to be the kind of thing she must admire. Her general impression of the day was that she slipped farther and farther away from him until the distance between them seemed actually formidable.

Since her engagement, her innocent head had been so full of dreams of him that he had seemed quite near—human, approachable, and dear. Now that he was there in the flesh, the old uncomfortable feeling that he and she had different standards and a different outlook was growing acute.

She was, however, too utterly inexperienced, too entirely the creation of her upbringing, to have any doubts as to the central fact of his love for her. He had asked her to be his wife—more than that—his "pal." His ideas of a pal seemed at present a trifle chilly, but she ascribed that to her own ignorance of the thing he sometimes obscurely alluded to as "life." She would have preferred it if his notions had been more primitive; if he had hugged her tight and called her his darling, she would have been reassured at once. That he did not do so was to her just one more indication of his "temperament"—a thing she did not in the least understand.

The man's mind was too preoccupied with its own bitterness to note the pathetic appeal of her eyes. He saw only her resolute outward tranquillity, and assured himself that so shallow a little person as his future wife would not suffer whatever might be the case with himself.

That evening there was a family gathering, so the lovers had no time to themselves. The well-meant facetiousness, the platitudinous remarks, the general "bromidism" of the Bowden set was a genuine ordeal to the bridegroom; and Chrissie saw how alien to him was the general tone and manner of her set, her kin, those among whom she had been brought up.

Yet the suicidal nature of the venture she was making did not present itself to her fully until she found herself, just half an hour too late, face to face with Eleanor Carmichael.

CHAPTER III.

In the drawing-room at Cadogan Crescent, husband and wife stood under a canopy of flowers from Uncle Joseph's conservatories at Surbiton, and shook hands with so many people that the statement that no invitations had



"Why, my good girl, that picture's great. It's going to live," said the artist calmly.
"Do you suppose I don't know just because I happen to
be the man who painted it?"

been issued proved to be the merest convention. Mr. and Mrs. Bowden and their sons and daughters had invited every one with whom they had shaken hands at the church to "drop in for a minute," and the response had been almost universal.

Her new light upon the situation enabled Chrissie to see that, to her husband, the absurdity of the floral canopy was a thing hardly to be borne in his present mood. Her own perception of his feeling turned her almost sick. She saw, with the insight that love, fully awakened, can bestow, that to be made ridiculous is little to a happy man, but sheer exasperation to a miserable one. She grew quite faint with the strength of her own perception of what he was undergoing. Turning her white face to his, she whispered hastily:

"Try to bear it a few minutes more, please—just until Uncle Joseph and Aunt Matilda have come upstairs. I'll make an excuse then, and we'll move before your friends arrive."

He gave her a quick glance, more friendly than she had seen on his face since his return from France.

"Good kid!" he said under his breath. "All right. I'll try and stick it."

Therefore, when Blundell and Miss Lockett walked in together, the bridal pair had cut their moorings and were drifting among the guests.

Blundell was near five and thirty. He was already a painter of note. He owed his nickname to his lightning bursts of rage and irritability. But there was no trace of either as he stood before the little bride and let his gaze plunge down into her pleading eyes. He thought it was like peering into a clear pool full of water plants, wherein thoughts, like gold and silver fish, darted to and fro, hiding among the thick vegetation, visible only by fits and starts—depths, surely, to repay the careful explorer?

"I say," he began, "oughtn't you two

to be standing under that canopy that smells so sweet? How the modern married couple does miss its opportunities! Why, man, you'll only be married once—or twice if you're unlucky—and for this one hour, you're the center of attraction! If I were you, I'd take the limelight while it's turned on full."

"Since when have you cultivated a taste for limelight, Blitz, old man?" cried Rolf.

Blitz fixed his flash-light eyes upon the curve of Chrissie's chin.

"Some chaps never know their luck," he said softly. "If I might be in your place, and stand up as the hero of this occasion with—with Mrs. Holderness at my side—I can assure you I'd take my chance."

Rolf flashed a glance at Blitz, who did not pay compliments. He heard the ring of conviction in his friend's voice and looked at his wife's face as it were with new eyes. The picture that had floated between him and any perception of his bride—the picture of Eleanor's red mouth, pursed for his passionate kisses—faded for the moment as Blitz's words jolted him out of his mad dream of regret.

He saw Chrissie smile up bravely at Blundell and reply lightly:

"Mr. Blundell knows how to compliment, doesn't he?"

"Give me a reward then—let me take you to have some champagne, for you look very pale," replied the artist promptly.

Chrissie assented at once, and they went off, the man contrasting with the other men in the room as a portrait of Van Dyck might show up in a collection of modern Royal Academy portraits. In fact, he was like a portrait by Van Dyck, and wore his chestnut beard in the mode of the seventeenth century.

"It's a particular pleasure to me to have some of Rolf's friends here," said Rolf's wife, "for, you see, I hardly know any of them. His mother and

sister live in Spain, you know, and they're not allowed to come over, on account of the U-boats."

"Shall you remain in London when Rolf goes back?" asked Blundell, as they stood sipping Mr. Bowden's excellent champagne. And when he gathered that she was fairly sure that she would, he eagerly invited her to his studio.

"I'd like to paint you," he said, in his blunt way, though with a tinge of gentleness that few persons called out in him. "Wouldn't it be a surprise for Rolf if I were to do him a portrait of you, all unbeknownst?"

Even as he made this incredible offer, he could see that she had simply no idea of the favor he was extending.

"He'd like anything that *you* painted, I suppose," she said dubiously. "He is terribly disdainful of our inartistic house."

At that moment, Holderness himself arrived in the dining room, escorting Aunt Matilda. Blundell gripped his arm and repeated to him the suggestion he had just made. Not only Rolf, but also Jane Lockett, who was standing near, looked positively awe-struck.

"I haven't given you a wedding present. Let me give you a portrait of your wife," said Blundell; and Chrissie, to her amazement, saw her husband positively stammer as he tried to voice his thanks.

Mr. Bowden at the moment fussed past, intent upon finding champagne for a dowager who badly needed rationing. Chrissie stopped him and introduced the two artists. Blundell's name was big enough to be known even to the possessor of "The Soul's Awakening," and he responded not merely with politeness, but with a due sense of the condescension of the lion, whose recent refusal to paint the wife of a very great financial magnate was the talk of the season.

Just as they were discussing the

point, and Rolf was searching his wife's face with serious eyes to find the key to Blundell's sudden enthusiasm, Connie and Edna Bowden came to find their sister, and led her away to change her dress.

In pursuance of Rolf's idea that nobody should know their destination, he had ordained that they should leave the house at four o'clock, as if to catch a train; so Chrissie went off obediently with her bridesmaids, leaving her husband still in talk with his friends. Then there was a loud knock at the house door, and everybody said:

"Another telegram! They must have had *dozens*!"

This telegram was addressed in full to Captain Holderness, 10th Wessex. Rolf, therefore, opened it forthwith, and his face changed.

"What is it?" cried his father-in-law anxiously.

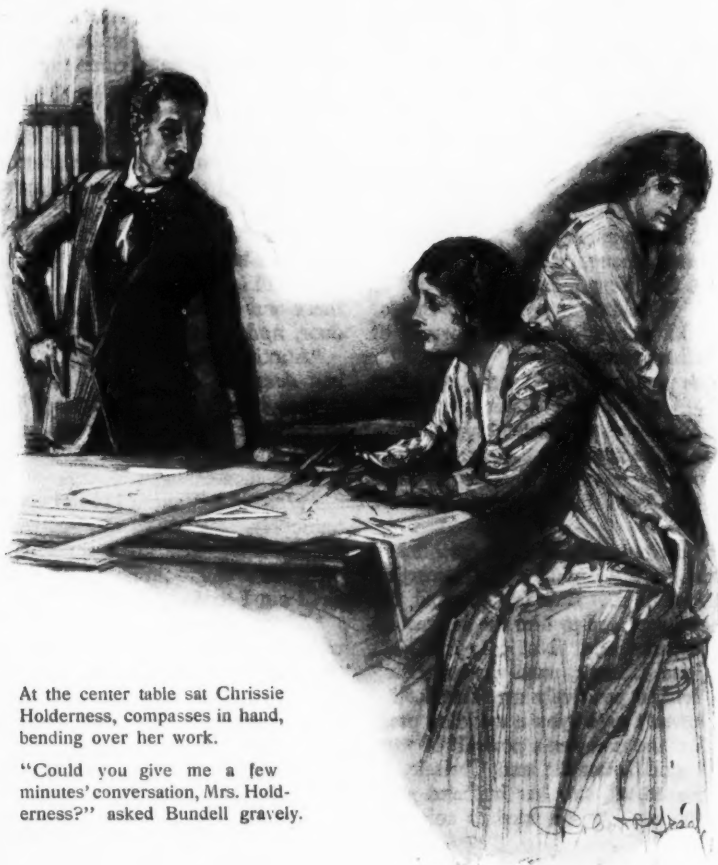
"My leave—my leave canceled," replied the bridegroom limply. "What the devil am I to do now?"

"*Leave canceled*?" The fatal words were caught up. They swept around the room in an eddy of dismay.

"His leave's canceled! Poor beggar! Got to report at Waterloo to-night at seven o'clock."

Rolf stood so still, staring at the floor, that the news might really have been to him the staggering blow every one assumed it to be. How could they tell the gladness, the unfeigned relief that flooded him? He had taken his revenge upon the woman who had jilted him in order to whistle him back at her own time, and, for the present at least, he need not pay the price.

For a few minutes this was his only thought, ousting all consideration for the child upstairs. What recalled him to the consideration of her was a chance encounter with the keen eyes of Blitz, which seemed to probe his very soul. He drew a deep breath, pushed back his hair, and said, suddenly and sharply:



At the center table sat Chrissie Holderness, compasses in hand, bending over her work.

"Could you give me a few minutes' conversation, Mrs. Holderness?" asked Bundell gravely.

"Wait, everybody! My wife is not to be told!"

Everybody paused.

"Not to be told?"

"Only by me," he replied. "Please let her finish dressing undisturbed, and send her to me in the morning room—alone."

Blundell stepped forward, took him by the arm, and led him apart.

"What can I do?" he asked. "Where are your things?"

Rolf collected himself.

"The Metropole. We were going there. We must still go, and I must repack all my kit. Will you call there for me, at six-thirty, and take me to Waterloo? She—she musn't come."

"I will. Poor little girl! Poor innocent, unfortunate little girl! Who could have foreseen that fate had a bludgeon like this in store for her?"

"Quite a mistake, Blitz. God's looking after her," muttered Rolf between

his teeth. "He's—keeping her safe. Most likely I shan't come back. Of course the canceling of that leave means that we're going into action at once. If—if I'm careful—I may be able to keep her illusions unbroken."

"Try, at least," said the other man. His voice was severe.

Rolf eyed him swiftly.

"You think me horribly to blame?"

"I think you've acted devilishly. Were there no other girls—just ordinary girls—who would have served your turn, without setting your heel on a lily of the valley and grinding it into the dust?"

Chrissie's husband drew himself up and opened his mouth to retaliate, but there was a murmur on the staircase: "She's coming down."

She came.

With a haunting idea of his likes and dislikes, she had insisted upon an artistic "going-away" dress. Blundell got an impression of soft, faint blue, with gray in it like a misty sky, and a hat with curves that were just right.

The bridegroom, wide-eyed, awaited her at the foot of the stairs. The message of his eyes told her a great deal without words. He laid his hand upon her arm.

"Come this way, Chris."

The guests, some frankly in tears, most of them with a lump in the throat, made their adieux and hurried away, that the unlucky young couple might not have the ordeal of facing them when the fatal news had been disclosed.

The door of the morning room closed upon the two and when they were shut in, Rolf stood before the girl, taking both her hands. For a moment he said no word. Then, dropping her hands, he gripped her by her slight shoulders.

"Chrissie, pull yourself together. I've something to tell you. It's bad news."

She turned perfectly white, but held herself firm and upright in his grasp.

She gave a big gasp, like the bursting of some barrier within, and cried out:

"I know what you have to tell me! It's that you've found out your mistake! Or—or perhaps that you're sorry for it—sorry for me! Since you saw Miss Carmichael again, face to face, you feel you can't face life—with me! Oh, I'm glad you know it! Of course I saw, the moment you came home, that there was something dreadful—something wrong—something that *wasn't there!*"

For a moment this wholly unexpected analysis of the situation so bereft him of breath that he forgot to open his mouth to deny it. But by the time she had done, he felt a mad gratification that he could give her so different a reason.

"Chrissie, you're mistaken—you're utterly mistaken! It's nothing of the kind! It's—it's this—just come. Better read it."

She took the telegram from his hand, and after reading it, said nothing for a moment. Then she smiled pitifully with one corner of her drooping mouth.

"This is very fortunate," she said slowly. "I congratulate you."

"Chrissie! What are you saying?"

"I'm telling you what you've never told me—the truth."

"Chrissie! Don't you believe me? That I——"

"That you care about me? I know you don't. Ah, why did you lead me into this terrible affair? It was very cruel. I had never done you any harm."

It was not until long after this shattering interview that he reflected upon his own lack of surprise at her unexpected insight. He uttered no protestations. He answered with the candor that he felt her tragedy gave her the right to demand.

"I turned to you when I thought my heart was broken. I suppose I felt that—with you—I might pull myself together again and—and face life. When she turned me down, I had a month of

hell. I was a selfish bounder—a mean hound. I know it all. I've nothing to say, except that I did want you."

"You didn't," returned Chrissie calmly. "All you wanted was just to show Miss Carmichael that you didn't care. And—and—when you saw her and me together, you knew you did care—and you were ashamed of me."

"That's not true! It's not a bit true! But for pity's sake, even if it were true, am I not being punished promptly? I've got to go back there, into the welter of it—the life I hate—and I don't suppose I shall ever see England or—or you—again. Be a bit sorry for me, if you can."

"What do you want me to do?" she asked, after a pause.

"I want you, if you will, to come with me to the Metropole and help me repack. My things are all over the place. Then we'll have a bit of dinner together, and then Blundell is coming to fetch me and see me off at Waterloo. Please say you'll come. There's such a lot to say. The question of money—me signing my will and so on. I want to leave you somehow provided for. Oh, Chrissie, let me do what I can!"

She gave a long, shuddering sigh.

"I suppose we must go on—just until this evening," she faltered. "Yes. All right. I'll go. I'll do as you wish. Nothing seems to matter much, does it?"

CHAPTER IV.

Everything was done. The kit had been somehow collected, bundled together, and restrapped. A pile of soiled clothing lay upon the floor of the hotel bedroom, to be sent to the laundry and thence back to him in France.

The forced intimacy was like a horrible caricature of what might have been.

Chrissie, who had never in her life seen Captain Holderness without his coat on, now saw him partially strip

and change. His underwear lay all about her—mixed up with leather waistcoats, cardigans, big gloves, rough towels, tobacco tins, straps, flasks, gas masks, and the like.

It was by no means the first time that Chrissie had superintended the packing of a kit, and she was resourceful to a degree that surprised Rolf. She had exclaimed in horror at the torn sleeping bag and the damp, mud-incrusted blanket and rugs. Ringing the bell, she had sent these things to be baked and scraped, while she had unlocked her own trunk, found her workbox, and set herself down to repair the sleeping bag. Under her energetic supervision, the hotel "boots" had dried and then brushed, until things were as far ship-shape as the lack of time allowed.

A curious way of spending the hours of one's wedding day! But at least the call for action, the need of industry, the employment of head and hands, saved one from madness. And now all was done. She looked at the clock.

"We must have dinner," said she, "or you'll be faint with hunger by the time you reach Southampton."

"How should I have got on without you?" he said wonderingly. "You're a little trump, Chris."

"Oh, I'm good enough at mending and packing. Dull women often are, I believe," she replied, as she rose and tidied away the sewing apparatus she had been using.

Then she went across to the washstand, pulled off her rings, and began to wash her hands. She had passed beyond the realms of coy embarrassment now. She did not even remember to think it odd that she and Rolf should be together in a bedroom, and that she should be washing her hands so composedly.

He exclaimed suddenly:

"You've taken off your wedding ring!"

She looked surprised.

"Why not?"

"I thought"—with some confusion—"that girls never took off their wedding ring."

"Oh?" Beyond the little interrogative sound, she made no reply, but replaced upon her finger the plain gold and the big bunch of diamonds. "Come," said she, "we'll go into the next room and ring for the soup."

He followed her to the adjoining room, wherein they could dine in private.

"Now, Chris," he said with determination, "there are things to be said before you and I part."

"Are there? No, I think we've said all we need," replied she in a lifeless way.

"Nothing of the kind. You accused me of pretty awful things, you know."

"And you admitted them, so why say any more? After all, I don't see that you've been much worse than I. I ought to have had more sense. I knew well enough that you didn't care—that you never were thinking about me—when you stepped with us.

I might have known, if I'd had any sense at all, that men don't fall in love in absence, with a girl they didn't concern themselves about when she was present. I took too much for granted. There was perhaps some excuse for me



The door of the big studio at Memling House opened and out came Blundell and Mrs. Holderness. They stepped into the road a few paces ahead of the two workmen.

while you were away, but the moment we met again, I ought to have known. You showed me so plainly that I was nothing to you."

"Oh, Chris, don't rub it in!"

"I don't want to. There's no need. And—and please don't be so upset. I really don't know that I mind much. I feel quite cool and steady inside—as if something had gone cold, right down in the heart of me."

"Anyhow, you're my wife, and you can't go back on that." He spoke with a kind of fierceness, to cover his remorse. Pulling a document from his pocket, he flung it on a side table. "That's my will. Blitz can sign it, when he comes, and the waiter, too, and I'll hand it over to Blitz to give to my lawyer. So, if anything goes wrong with me, there's money to come to you, little woman—enough to make you independent of your own people. Oh, yes," as she made some movement of repudiation, "I know you'd rather not have it, but you must at least let me do what I can. You don't want to humiliate me and yourself before everybody, do you? Do you, Chris? Do you want to tell your people how I've behaved?"

She stood gravely turning things over in her mind, and was aware that she did not.

"Do you mean," she began hesitatingly, "that I have enough money to live upon, without applying to them?"

"You have—at least I think so," he replied eagerly. "Not enough to run a house and servants, but quite enough to be comfortable in rooms or a hotel."

He came over to her and gave her some memoranda, explaining exactly what her resources would be—a few hundred a year, but it seemed wealth to Chrissie, whose own father allowed her but ten pounds per quarter, as in her maiden days.

"I don't know how far I can expect you to regard my wishes," he told her

meekly, "but, after all, we are married, and I think I have a right to ask that you should for the present accept that position—that you shouldn't make public our—our——"

"Mistake."

"No, I won't call it that. Our disagreement, if you like—at least until we've had time to think it out—say until I get leave again. If I don't stop a bullet during this push, I shall be senior for next leave. They always arrange that when a chap gets his leave canceled."

The girl stood twisting her hands together, her little teeth holding her under lip, her eyes gazing out into the vacant future.

"I don't feel as if I knew—as if I ought to promise *anything*. I simply feel as if I'd been stunned. When I come to life again, how do I know what I'm likely to feel? But, oh, why don't they bring your dinner? You'll have to go before——"

As she spoke the waiter rushed in with the first course.

Before the sweet had appeared, in walked Blitz, and with him he brought Miss Lockett.

"Forgive me, Rolf, if I'm unwelcome," said she, "but I felt this poor little lady ought not to be left alone, so I told her people I'd look after her, and I want to coax her to come home with me."

"Jolly good of you, Jane, old sport," said the bridegroom wearily. "You can make yourself useful in another direction, too. I'm about to sign my will, and you and Blitz can witness it. Then shove it into your pocket, old man, and take it down to Lincoln's Inn to-morrow for them to put in the safe."

When this was done, the two men disappeared into the bedroom to see that all was clear and the luggage gone. Miss Lockett turned to the bride and put her strong arm about the shrinking shoulders.

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"Look here, Babs," said she, "I was always fond of children. Wouldn't you rather not go back home? For myself, I can imagine nothing more ghastly than to lie awake in your little bed the whole night before your wedding—and to find yourself back in precisely the same spot next night! If you happen to feel like that, why not come home with me? I've plenty of room, and I'm a very old friend of that odd young husband of yours."

Something in the masculine voice and honest eyes of the lady, mingling oddly with her green-and-yellow beads and hair dragged down into her shrewd, crow's-footed eyes, made instant appeal, as it had in the church that morning, to the forlorn bride.

"Oh—would you?" she gasped, in precisely the note of unexpected reprieve that Jane had hoped for.

The two men returned, and Miss Lockett explained. Blitz undertook to send word of the arrangement to Cado-gan Crescent.

"I expect they'll think I'm mad," said Chrissie feebly.

"They'll say so, but they won't really think so. They'll be very relieved in their hearts," replied Jane. "All right, then. As soon as you two are off, I'll call a taxi and carry off this chick and her boxes, too."

"Talking of boxes," said Rolf vaguely, feeling in his pocket, "here's the box I bought for the play to-night. Why don't you two go? Better than sitting and looking at each other."

Chrissie said nothing. Life had swung her too far this day for her to be capable of independent action.

"You two had better say good-by here," said Blundell, in tones carefully heartless and matter-of-fact.

He drew Jane with him from the room, remarking to her as they reached the corridor:

"If he has an ounce of fine feeling or compassion in him, now is his time."

Chris and her husband stood looking at each other at last, with nothing between them but the naked fact of parting.

The thought of Eleanor Carmichael had faded back right out of sight in Rolf's mind. He saw only the child's face, wax white, confronting him in such illimitable woe. It broke him down.

"Oh, Chris, Chris!" he muttered, holding out his arms. "For pity's sake try to forgive me! Try to help me! I'm not worth it! I'm a d——d scoundrel who ought to be kicked, but if anybody could make anything of me, it's you! Say you'll try! Say you'll try!"

She made a little inarticulate sound, so moving that he lost himself in a whirlwind of pity. For the first time, he snatched to his heart and held her, as if by strong constraint he could force his love and hers together. And, with the feel of her pliant young body, the damask of her cheek which no man's lips but his own had ever pressed, there came to him a sudden outpouring of tenderness, as if some spring in his being had been tapped, whose existence he had never hitherto suspected.

"Chris! Chris!" he sobbed, as his mouth found hers at last; and with that the cold despair melted about her frost-bound heart, and suddenly she was yielding to him, weeping in his arms, realizing that this, the first time, was also in all likelihood the last.

Rolf sank down in a chair with her upon his knees, rocking her, imploring pardon, telling her that she was his one chance of salvation, his star of hope.

She clung to him, reckless of all but the sudden wild ecstasy of the moment, listening to his voice, broken to a tone she had never heard from him before, saying, almost whispering, such things as she had never dreamed of, but breaking off drearily in a moment of recollection.

"And now we must part—now—when we've only met this moment."

Blundell knocked at the door.

"I'm afraid you ought to be getting along, old man."

He was really touched by the white agony of the face that emerged from that doorway. Rolf wrung Jane's hand without speech, merely making a motion over his shoulder that she should go to his wife. Then he crashed downstairs as if pursued by furies and leaped into the waiting taxi, never looking up to the window where Chris and Jane stood. He dropped his head in his hands without shame as they started away among the traffic, nor did he lift it again until they were crossing Westminster Bridge.

CHAPTER V.

Eleanor Carmichael stood in Room 11 at Burlington House, gazing upon Blundell's portrait of Chrissie Holder-ness. It was entitled in the catalogue:

A SOLDIER'S WIFE

Portrait of Mrs. Rolf Holderness.

Rupert Blundell, A. R. A.

It represented a glimpse of an office interior. The girl whose life-size presentment it was sat at a typewriter, which stood upon a roll-top desk stacked with papers. She had turned from her work to read a letter. The letter, written in pencil, was open in her hand, and upon her knee lay its stampless envelope, with the square pink mark of the field post office.

She wore a simple office frock, and one would have said there was nothing particularly arresting, either in the composition or the coloring. Yet it was the picture of the year. All day crowds stood before it and turned away in an odd silence. One felt the strain of the war, somehow—the business absorption of the lonely girl with her heart always the sport of destiny, at the

mercy of the gunfire of hostile millions.

Eleanor had, of course, come prepared to sneer. That Blitz—Blitz of all men—should descend to the painting of a popular picture—a picture before which Academy crowds would halt! For the matter of that, that Blitz should submit tamely to the "A. R. A." now tacked on to his brigand name! He, the outlaw, who had defied the beaten track for so long, that he should yield at last! So Eleanor whispered to herself as she tried her hardest not to admire the sincerity, the breadth, the feeling, in the canvas before her.

"She's not like that. He's painted it all into her face. It isn't really there. The long and short of it is that old Blitz is in love with the little grass widow. Just the sort of dolly that a really clever man takes up with. Finds her restful, I suppose."

She turned from her reverie to see Blundell himself standing at a little distance, his eyes upon her in considerable amusement. Smiling radiantly, she pushed her way out of the crowd and joined him, and when they had greeted, they found places on the center divan.

"Well," said Blitz at once, "and how do you like it?"

It was so unlike him to ask for an opinion on his work that she opened wide eyes of wonder. Then she determined to let him have it. If all the world praised him, he should yet have truth from her. She smiled lazily.

"Too perfectly sweet!" said she.

Blitz's face lit up with humor.

"Bravo!" he replied. "I thought as much! I'm glad, on the whole, to find you just as bad a critic as I expected!"

She sat up, puzzled, eying him.

"Critic! That wasn't criticism! Are you asking me to criticize that picture?"

"I wanted to find out what you really thought of it, and you've given me your opinion in a phrase. You think that portrait belongs to the 'too-perfectly-"

sweet' order of art. Deny it if you can."

"Well, Blitz, isn't it perilously near it?"

"Why, my good girl, that picture's great. It's going to live," said the artist calmly. "Do you suppose I don't know, just because I happen to be the man who painted it? The real stuff is in it. It's fit to hang on the same wall with a Velasquez. In fact, it's so good that I've forced the old Johnnies to admit it. They've made me, the outlaw, an A. R. A. on the strength of it! In other words, the revolution is inaugurated. I must write and tell Holderness all about it."

"Have you good news of Rolf?" asked Eleanor, gazing idly around.

"Not so recent as you have, I presume?"

"Oh," with an embarrassed laugh, "I don't hear very regularly."

"Indeed? I think Mrs. Holderness hears every second day."

There was a short pause. Then Eleanor asked evenly:

"How does she like this office work? Is it for the war office?"

"She's doing some very fine work now, I understand. Not the work she's there represented as doing. She began like that, but her merit was outstanding, and they soon transferred her to something more important."

"Ah! Then it's true, what we heard."

"What who heard?"

"Max Ritter, to be exact. He was told that she's shut up in some secret place, doing specification drawings of the last new submarine-destroying dodge."

Blitz gave this much the same scornful amusement that he had bestowed upon her art criticism.

"That's a good story," said he. "Ritter must have evolved it out of his own colossal brain. But since there's been a new infallible specific at least every

six months since the beggars started, I wonder that he should still be nibbling."

"I don't quite know what you mean, but I'm afraid, so far, we're not destroying them half as fast as good patriots could wish," observed Miss Carmichael slowly. "Max doesn't think so. He's very uneasy. You know he himself had a splendid idea, only the war office, or the admiralty, or whoever it is——"

"The food control, perhaps?"

"Don't be ridiculous! Turned him down!"

"They probably thought the remedy emanated from a tainted source."

"How hidebound you are, Blitz! You don't know how poor Max has felt it—the way his old friends have cut him. Surely you're not so ungenerous as to pretend you think him a traitor?"

"No pretense about it. I'm sure he's not a traitor—to his own country."

"Which is England."

"Is it?"

"Blitz, you are odious!"

"Eleanor, you and I were once pals. Take a word from Daddy Blitz. Drop Ritter."

Blundell's voice was suddenly as soft as he alone knew how to make it. Eleanor did not at once reply, and, glancing at her, he was just in time to intercept a look in those misty blue eyes that might have been termed beseeching. She made a movement of her body, slipping along the seat so as to come nearer to him, and began:

"Ah, you don't know——" Here intervened a distinct pause, but, instead of the words he looked for, she ended with "what a good fellow he is."

"He's a German, a regular out-and-out German. No shame to him. If I were an Englishman in Berlin, should I lose my sympathy with my own country? I say nothing against Ritter when I say I know him to be a public danger."

"You know? Oh, Blitz, then why

don't you act?" The words actually leaped from her lips, and Blitz cursed himself for an incautious fool.

"I was speaking of moral certainty," he said hastily. "One can't act on that, unfortunately."

"Can't you? At least, if you think as you say you do, you ought to give the government a warning, ought you not?"

"They had the beast in their hands, and they let him go. What's the use of my talking?"

"Well," remarked Eleanor after a longish pause, "he's been at large for a couple of years now, and no harm has come of it."

"True; which may show that our secret police are not quite so inefficient as we sometimes fancy."

"Do you think," very swiftly, "that the secret police are on Max's track?"

"My dear Eleanor, what have I to do with the secret police?"

She laughed slyly:

"If you *had* anything to do with them, you wouldn't be likely to own it, would you?"

"Are you endeavoring to pump me, young woman?"

"A dry enough pump! And the oil I could offer won't grease it—eh, Blitz?"

"Afraid not. At least it would be dishonest of me to let you waste time and skill—such skill!—upon a dry well. Nothing in it!"

"Except perhaps Truth—at the bottom?"

"I handed her out to you at the beginning of this interview. I told you to drop Max." He rose as he spoke. "I might repeat the caution with my leave-taking. Are you by any chance thinking of marrying him?"

The toss of her head was like that of a proud young horse maddened by a bearing rein.

"I haven't made up my mind," she said slowly.

CHAPTER VI.

Blundell walked back meditatively to Memling House, the charming little old place which he had bought in Studio Lane, an almost unknown backwater of Kensington, and to which he had added a large studio. Into the vestibule of this annex he let himself with a latch-key and walked through the large, light, quiet place, where were to be found none of the modern expensive trappings of a show studio.

Reaching the farther end, where the new building joined the little old house beyond, he unlocked the door and passed through into a narrow, dark passage, found the stairs, and ascended to the first floor, where he knocked upon a door.

"Who is it?" was demanded from within.

He replied, giving a word that was apparently a passport, for a key turned and he entered a small, well-lit room, provided with large, desk-topped tables. These were covered with sheets of cartridge paper upon which diagrams had been traced with exquisite precision.

At the center table sat Clirissie Holderness, compasses in hand, bending over her work. She wore a rose-colored overall of spotless neatness. On either side of her, two other women were busy upon work of the same character.

"Could you give me a few minutes' conversation, Mrs. Holderness?" asked Blundell gravely.

He saw Chris' eyes flash from one to the other of her two subordinates. She then replied:

"I'm afraid I must ask you to wait for the lunch break, Mr. Blundell. Where shall I find you then? In the studio?"

"If you please," he replied ceremoniously and, turning, went out again, hearing the key turn in the lock behind him as he went downstairs. Returning

to the door communicating with his studio, he opened it and examined with care the bolts and lock. Then he reached up to the lintel, touched a spring, and watched a second door, made of iron, slip out from the thickness of the wall. The fastenings of this also he examined with an electric light. Then he walked to the bend of the passage, where he should have been able to go through into the dwelling rooms of the house. This outlet had been lately walled up. The plaster was not yet dry. He held up his light and searched carefully for cracks, or any kind of mark, but found none.

His brow was knit as he went back to the studio, walked its entire length, and round from it to the small garden at the rear of his premises, flanked by a blind wall that formed the back of a large riding school and stables.

His eye traveled to the two windows of the first-floor room in which the drawing was going on. These had lately been protected by a set of iron bars. Entrance that way was impossible. The roof of the little house had no skylight; so there was no way into this room but by the strongly protected stair from below or the barred windows above.

Blundell went indoors again, reflective, and mooned about with his pipe for half an hour, burnishing a suit of old armor to pass the time until he heard voices on the stairs and knew that Chris had let out the two clerks to go to lunch. They entered, dressed for the street, and made their exit together. There was a further sound of keys turning, and then Chrissie appeared.

The four months that had elapsed since her marriage had given her face all that he had put into the picture. As she came toward him, still with her business gravity on her face, he thought her perfectly lovely.

"Come along in to lunch with me,"

he said. "You haven't lunched with me for weeks, and I've something of importance to discuss."

She smiled.

"I often feel too tired to talk when I come from work," she said apologetically. "But I'll make an exception to-day, so lead on!"

They went together out of the studio door, and as it was raining a little, she made allusion to Blitz's patriotism in blocking himself out of his own house in order to assure the safety of the important drawings.

He did not reply until they were in his comfortable bachelor dining room, upon the table of which was spread a cold meal—salad, fish rissoles, fruit, and so on. When she was seated, he drew a heavy portière across the door, sat down near her, poured Chianti into her glass, and began:

"As you know, I never thought it a sensible plan of Dunmow's to have the things done here. It saved a lot of money and fuss, no doubt, but——"

"But?"

"If it hadn't insured my seeing you almost every day, I think I should have advised against it."

Her eyes were anxious.

"You speak as if you thought—as if you feared——"

He rested his folded arms upon the table and fixed his eyes upon her.

"How could Max Ritter possibly have come to know that you were occupied in this work?"

"Max Ritter! Impossible!"

"I met Miss Carmichael at the R. A. this morning, and she told me she had heard it from him."

Chris sat staring. Some secret thought turned her scarlet.

"Oh, Mr. Blundell," she said at last, under her breath, "it couldn't be! It must be a chance shot!"

He kept his gaze on the tablecloth, and in spite of his pity for her, he had to go on.

"But your husband knows?"

"He knows I'm doing important government work, and that I'm doing it here——"

"And he is in communication with Eleanor."

She looked up, carefully unconcerned, but with tightened lips.

"Of course—he would be."

"At least she says so."

"But you know better than to think—— Ah, Blitz, you know he wouldn't tell her *that*! Is it likely he would tell her anything she could hand on? Why, you know it was about Max they quarreled."

He made no reply, and she pursued feverishly:

"Are all the censorship people to be trusted, do you think?"

"Your letters to the front are not censored."

There was a silence. At last:

"Both these clerks you have are to be trusted, I suppose?" he asked.

"That brings me to what I wanted to speak to you about. These women were not my own choice. The department handed them out to me, so I'm not responsible for them. I believe them to be trustworthy. I've never noticed the least thing to the contrary, except——"

"Except?"

"It hardly seems worth mentioning, but as Lord Dunmow directed me to notice everything they said or did, of course I do. Last week, I found a pocket handkerchief belonging to Miss Hunter lying on the window sill. It was all crunched up, just as it had been in her pocket, not spread out as if she had meant it to be a signal, and she said she had shaken crumbs from it upon the window sill for the birds and forgotten it. She was apologetic, but not too much so. She did not seem confused. I reminded her that it was forbidden to open the windows at the bottom. But since then I've never left

either of them in the room for a moment without me."

"H'mph!" said Blundell reflectively. "That may or may not mean anything. But I'd better get Miss Hunter's address and record from the office. She's not likely to be acquainted with Ritter himself, but one of his lot has quite likely got hold of her and made love and pretended to arrange a code of signals. I don't quite see where a man could stand, so as to detect a handkerchief on that window sill, but you never know."

"Please find out all you can," she urged, "so as to exonerate Rolf completely. Ah, you don't think it of him, do you?"

"I hardly know. He's no fool. But I'm pretty sure that Ritter is going to risk his very neck to lay his hands on these drawings." He broke off a moment, then added with a deep seriousness, "Mrs. Holderness, I'll take you into full confidence. *We hope to catch him red-handed.*"

She gave a frightened gasp.

"He's too powerfully backed for us to down him with anything short of that. He has some hold over this chap in Parliament—just as he has established a hold over poor Eleanor."

"A hold over her?"

"Yes. I've no doubt at all that he has lent her money and can put the screws on. She isn't the kind of woman who takes to spying for the sheer love of the thing, is she?"

"I—I hardly know. I've only seen her once or twice."

"Well, I knew her before that devil got his claws into her."

Chris heaved a long sigh—compounded partly of horror, partly of surprise that she, who had lived so long in the "take-it-all-for-granted" atmosphere of Cadogan Crescent, should be passing through times like these. Her mind was working away at its problem.

"I never said a word to Rolf about

your having invented this wonderful thing," she began, but Blitz cut in quickly:

"Oh, when you say 'invented'—I'm not a practical engineer. I only had the notion. I had to get men with tools to work it out."

"Well, isn't that inventing? I say, nobody knows about it."

He smiled across the table at her.

"Yourself, madam. I don't count Dummow and the admiralty lot."

"Well, then, why should Ritter suspect your house?"

"Because he's found out that you are on this work. If he knows that, of course he knows where you go every day. Nothing easier. The point is—how did he know it? I can't but suspect that it was through Eleanor, via Rolf, little as Rolf himself may suspect it."

She shook her head in obstinate unbelief.

"Is there anything I could do?" she asked.

"Keep an eye on Miss Hunter, and never let your keys out of your own keeping for a moment. I think you're safe enough, going and coming. What Ritter wants is the plans, and they're of no use to him until they are quite finished. I have a scheme in my head—an idea—if it can be worked out. Would you help?"



With her free hand, Eleanor turned the handle. "Why," said she swiftly, "this door is locked!"

"You know I would. So would Jane."

"Jane was always a sport. You and she still get on together?"

"Excellently. Her flat really was too big for her in war time, and it's just what I wanted. I'm making my rooms quite habitable with her help—though I have to wrestle hard with my inherited instincts!" She laughed quite gayly.

"At least," thought Blundell, gazing earnestly at her, "she isn't breaking her

heart for him." He sat pondering for some moments and then inquired suddenly:

"Would Jane forgive it, do you think, if I let her in for a share of the conspiracy?"

Chris looked quite eager.

"I think she'd thank you on her bended knees! She's seething with what you might call potential patriotism! The thought of being of some real use——"

Blundell made no reply. She could see that he was weighing something deeply in his mind. It was a part of her virtue that she knew when to be silent. She sat now perfectly still, with a hundred questions on the tip of her tongue.

At last he pushed back his chair and looked at her.

"I might work it another way," he said, "but it seems to me that the risk would be too great. There's information that I must convey to Ritter through Eleanor. If I give it her by word of mouth, he wouldn't believe it. He'll think it almost certain that I'm purposely giving false information. I think we must let it seem to come through Rolf."

"Oh!" cried Chris springing up, her face aflame. "If you could do it any other way——"

"For the first time since I've known you, Mrs. Rolf, you protest before you know the facts. Listen. I mean to go and have tea with Eleanor. I own that I haven't been for some time. As you know, her old set have practically dropped her since she took up Ritter. But our chance meeting at Burlington House will suggest a reason for my little attempt to renew old friendship. I'll have with me a pocketbook, which will contain a letter from me to Rolf, written, stamped, and ready to be posted. I shall accidentally leave this pocketbook and its contents behind me in the hall, and shall not call for it

until the following morning. In that interval, we can be absolutely certain that the letter will be steamed open and read."

"And will you know whether it's been tampered with?" asked Chris breathlessly.

"We have plenty of experts who will," he replied, smiling. "But I'm practically sure it will be done, because Ritter can't afford to miss a single chance. And I don't think either of them would give me credit for doing such a thing on purpose."

"You must be very careful to make what you say in the letter sound unintentional."

"Rather!"

"And you won't ever really post the letter, will you?"

"Oh, no, it'll be just a decoy. For your satisfaction, little lady, I'll just say that, if Rolf is the man I take him for, he writes very little to Miss Carmichael. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised to know that he has never sent her a line since he went back."

He saw a look of pleasure spread slowly over the tense little face. What he said comforted her, for she had come to rely upon him. He had to choke back most of what he would have liked to say, for he knew that even a few unguarded words from him would destroy that childlike trust and spoil their friendship.

"You understand, Mrs. Rolf, that you're to say no syllable of any of this to a soul until I give you leave? Particularly must you not mention it to our Jane, even though I may be letting her in for something a bit disagreeable. The fewer the people in the know, the simpler for us all. Have I your promise, little lady?"

She laid her hand in his, and her eyes met his with such ardent loyalty and blind faith that he had to fight down his craving to snatch her to his heart.

"Blitz, I promise," she answered.

It was seldom that she used his pet name, and the fact that she had done so was a drop of cool water in the desert of his craving soul.

CHAPTER VII.

The succeeding week went by slowly. It may have been simply the knowledge that Blundell seriously believed the secrecy of his plans to be in danger, but it seemed to Chrissie that even the walls had eyes. The work was nearing completion, and as the time arrived, the strain grew greater. The notion that Ritter was holding his hand only until all was done before making a supreme attempt to possess himself of these treasures was nerve-wearing to a degree that Chris had not foreseen.

More than once, she was fairly certain of being followed. Not on her way to work, for her enemies had ascertained long ago where she went, but after business hours—on one occasion when she was actually on her way to interview Lord Dunmow.

She did as instructed by Blundell in the event of such a contingency—hailed a taxi, directed him to a large West End draper's shop, alighted, entered at the main entrance, left at another in a different street, called another taxi, and drove off in a different direction.

She was certain that Miss Hunter maneuvered to be left alone in the workroom, and the strain of keeping this girl always under her eye grew exhausting. She had not much fear that the secrets of the plans themselves could be conveyed by this girl, since she was ignorant and rather stupid, though exquisitely neat and correct in her work. It would be only by means of tracings that she could carry away data, and on one occasion Chris was almost sure that she was doing this. After that her attention to Miss Hunter's work was unrelenting. As to the most vital sections of the drawings, the

head of the workroom kept these in her own capable hands, and did not bring them out until her assistants were gone.

She had no more private talks with Blundell, and did not even know whether he had carried out his scheme with regard to the letter and his visit to Eleanor. But one day she reached home, very tired, to find that Jane had a visitor—none other than Miss Carmichael herself.

It had been a most exhausting day, for the drawings were all but finished. In fact, next day would see the last of them. She had that evening most gladly said good-by to the two clerks and seen them off the premises, not to return. The work had been hard, even without counting the nerve strain. She felt that she needed a rest, and was wondering whether a few days' leave would be granted her.

The situation was complicated by the fact that Rolf expected to be given leave very shortly. She could not be out of the way when he returned, though her mind winced away from the thought of what could possibly happen. She did not make the mistake of laying too much stress upon their parting. His own sense of his bad behavior—his remorse and compunction—had been quite enough to melt his heart in those last moments. His letters since had been full of contrition, and in them she discerned an honest effort to make the best of things and to take an interest in his wife. But she could feel that it *was* an effort, and every now and then she believed that she got an inkling of what it was costing him.

The one compensation she found in the strenuous nature of her work was that it kept her from thought. She had her mind so much upon the stretch all day, and came home at night so weary, that she had not time to dwell upon her wrecked life.

Insistent fears were, however, knocking at the door as the date of the prob-

able leave drew near. They were coloring her mood as she made her way back to the flat in Carisbrook Mansions which she shared with Jane, who, though possessed of comfortable means, was only too glad, in war time, to find so congenial a companion to share her expenses. It was odd that Chris should prove so sympathetic to these two chosen friends of Rolf's to whom he had feared to introduce her.

It was a gay evening at the beginning of May, and Jane, to whom rations were quite a side issue, so long as she could buy tulips and iris for her vases, had made her room, half parlor, half studio, gay with rainbow blossoms. As Chris pushed open the door, it seemed a bower of gladness in a dreary world.

By the open window sat Jane, in what she called a tea gown, but her friends described as a dressing gown, of mustard-colored wool-backed satin, the surface considerably impaired by wear. Her scraggy neck was loaded with purple and coral-colored beads, to suit the tulips and iris. Beside her, some one was drinking tea—some one tall and graceful, who rose to her feet as Chris entered, holding out her hand with a pleading smile.

"How delightful to see you, dear Mrs. Holderness!" said Miss Carmichael. "Mr. Blundell was calling upon me a few days back, and he told me our dear Jane, here, would be glad to see me. I said I thought I was in disgrace, but he laughed at the idea, so I ventured; and she has been so kind. Will you be kind, too?"

"Why not?" said Chris composedly, as she sat down and pulled off her gloves. "I'm glad to see any of Jane's friends, of course. Tea, please, old thing. I'm parched with thirst."

"Ah, you work so hard!" said Eleanor in her thrilling voice, which Chris always seemed to hear as it were through Rolf's ears. "Is Mr. Blundell a hard taskmaster?"

Chris looked up from her teacup in surprise.

"Mr. Blundell? I'm working for the government."

"Yes, but under Mr. Blundell."

Chris laughed a little.

"Mr. Blundell isn't in the government," she said scornfully. "Who's been telling you that fairy tale?"

"Why, Blitz told me himself."

Chris seemed highly amused.

"Well, if so, either you misunderstood him, Miss Carmichael, or else—pardon the vulgarity—he must have been pulling your leg."

Eleanor grew quite pink. Jane was laughing, too.

"What put that into your head?" said she. "Oh, of course, I know! It's because Chris sat to him for her portrait and used to go every day to the studio for sittings. Quite enough to start a story like that!"

Jane was as honest as the day, and as she spoke, Chris was inly breathing thanks to Blitz for having made her swear to keep everything from the dear lady, whose complete unconsciousness was worth much at this moment. How nearly Eleanor's probe had gone home! That lie about Blundell having been her informant had been well told indeed!

"My sittings are all over, some time ago now," said she kindly, as one instructing the ignorant.

Then she switched off the talk to the pictures of the year, and extracted an opinion of the great Blundell's masterpiece so much more favorable than that given by the lady to the master himself as to be a keen joy to Chris, who wondered what critic of renown Eleanor had since encountered, to change her views so markedly.

Somehow the talk had drifted to air raids. Eleanor guided it, but very cleverly. Nobody who was not aware of her drift could say that she dragged it in. Thence she slipped on smoothly, and most naturally, to the submarine

menace. That week the sinkings had been serious, and Jane joined her vehemently in deploring them.

"If the government could hit upon some way to rid us of that pest, they would indeed earn all our votes!" cried the visitor fervently. "Did you know there's a rumor flying about that such a thing has been at last discovered?"

"Is there? What kind of a thing?" cried Chris. "Do tell us about it."

"Oh, come, Mrs. Holderness! You know far more of the matter than I do! Isn't the whole thing Mr. Blundell's own invention?"

Chris pursed up her mouth with a naughty look.

"Mr. Blundell's invention seems to have been in excellent working order when he tried it on you the other day, Miss Carmichael," said she mischievously. "What had you done to provoke him to such a revenge? What else did he tell you?"

Eleanor lost her temper.

"It wasn't from Mr. Blundell that I heard of his wonderful idea. Every one is talking of it," she snapped.

"Jane, ask him to supper and extort a full account from him," said Chris eagerly. "How dare he keep such a thing from his nearest and dearest?"

"Well," said Jane, in simple surprise, "frankly, Miss Carmichael, I don't believe it. If Blitz had invented anything at all, he'd be as proud as a peacock, and the first thing he would do would be to come bragging to me."

"Or to Mrs. Holderness," venomously from Eleanor.

"Yes, or to me! I'm his friend, too, through Rolf! I should be told, I'm sure of it! I can't believe there can be anything in it."

"I wish there were, with all my soul!" cried Jane. "I'd leave every penny of my fortune to Blitz, if he had invented anything to stop these devils in their work!"

Eleanor sat quite still for a minute

or two, considering. This was a surprise to her. Jane was a person whose every thought showed like a pebble in clear water. She was utterly incapable of such a bluff as this. She could not know. Then Chris Holderness had worked for Blitz all this time without telling her a word! Had it not been for a certain document in her pocket, she would have concluded that Ritter was on a totally wrong scent. Knowing this not to be so, there was but the one alternative. *The thing must be of deadly importance.*

She talked a little more, all she said slipping harmlessly off the cool armor of Chris' composure. When she left them, and was seated in a taxi on her way home, she drew from her pocket a copied extract from a letter and read it over carefully:

As it is your wife who will take the risk, I am bound, in my own view, to inform you what the risk will be. It will last but a few hours, and I think it will amount to very little. So far as I can tell, we are not suspected, nor is anybody watching us. However, in a case of this kind, as you will judge from the information in my last, we are taking no risks. To make assurance doubly sure, I am not taking the most vital diagrams direct to Whitehall. They will very unostentatiously leave the place you know of by hand, and be deposited for the night in old Jane's flat, whence the authorities themselves are to collect them next morning in any fashion that seems to them safest.

It may seem to you exaggerated precaution, but remember what hangs upon it. And if you ask why I should expose your wife to danger by placing the plans under the same roof with her, my reply is that a flat occupied by two maiden ladies, without even a maid sleeping in the house, is the last place in which one would search for government secrets. Their very helplessness is their security.

"With this in my pocket," reflected Miss Carmichael, smiling, "it was, to say the least of it, odd that that chit of a girl should suppose that she could bluff me. Jane knows nothing, evidently. Yes, it's by far the best and simplest plan. Memling House may be

guarded—it probably is. And even if it were not, it's always risky to knock down and kill a man in a London street. Besides—I don't want Blitz killed. Now whereabouts, in that flat, would that chit of a girl deposit valuables? If it were left to her, she'd lock them up in a trunk under her bed and sleep with the key under her pillow. But she has Blitz at the back of her—Blitz, who painted her with all these government secrets in her eyes and all these unsuitable responsibilities weighing down her ridiculous little shoulders! He'll advise hiding them among all that mess in the corner of Jane's studio, or in one of those ottoman things with which the place is strewn. A few minutes' systematic search would find them, and without disturbing the women. Yes! Our plan is to allow them to go on supposing that nobody is on the watch! Let them carry their precious plans unmolested into the flat. Trust Max and his men to do the rest!

"Ah, what a nation of fools we are! Sunk in our sense of security still, after all these years of blundering war and successful treachery! Old Blitz hugging himself with the belief that nobody knows the use to which his studio has been put—that nobody is on the watch, either for him or his inventions! To realize how gullible my country is—how completely a prey to the intellect of Germany—is almost to make me feel that I could be content to become a German's wife. Oh, how I hate stupidity!"

At the last word, her brow contracted and she heaved a sigh that was almost a groan, for Chris Holderness at least had not been stupid. The little insipid girl, as Eleanor termed her, who had stolen the man whom Eleanor still loved, had fenced marvelously that afternoon.

"If only," thought Eleanor, "that little girl were backed up by one or

two accomplices with brains, she might be positively dangerous. What made Rolf think her stupid, I wonder? Men never can discriminate. If a girl is simple-minded and half educated and undeveloped, they call her stupid. 'A dear little soul,' he told me, 'but an utter muff—with the art instinct of a provincial postmistress.' Master Rolf, you made a bad mistake somewhere! I wonder what she'll do with you when she gets you back?"

CHAPTER VIII.

After the finding and reading of the letter in Blundell's pocket, Ritter had at first been of the opinion that his easiest course was to capture the man himself, with the plans upon him, on his way from Memling House to Jane's flat.

Up to the very last moment he had not decided against this plan, and had helpers posted in one or two hiding places along the little bent alley, which led nowhere.

Something that might or might not have been chance decided him against this course.

It was about seven o'clock on a cold, gusty evening, spitting frozen rain. It was still fully daylight when there came into sight around the bend of Studio Lane a couple of sturdy workmen with their tools on their backs, apparently going home. They had hardly made their appearance when the door of the big studio at Memling House opened and out came Blundell and Mrs. Holderness, the former carrying an attaché case which was large and seemed heavy, the latter a long roll of paper or parchment, too large to be packed inside it.

They stepped into the road a few paces ahead of the two workmen, who were going the same way. And at the moment there came into view at the other end of the road, first a nonde-

script individual, apparently in a hurry, and next a large, heavy policeman, who advanced like the nondescript, as it were to meet the workmen and the artists.

This amounted to a congestion of traffic hitherto without parallel in the history of Studio Lane. Was it coincidence? Anyway, it forced Max's hand. In full sight of three witnesses, his own man was powerless, even if reinforced. He could not even follow until the policeman was out of sight.

This solid representative of law and order was in no hurry. He walked along, calmly unobservant, until he reached Memling House, where he came to a standstill, close to where Ritter himself was lurking, and seemed to be absorbed in the contemplation of Blundell's front door. After some long moments, he strolled on again, but just as it seemed likely that he would turn the corner, and Ritter was preparing to spring out, he seemed to take an interest in the movements of the nondescript, and stood in full view to watch him out of sight at the end of the lane opposite that at which Blundell and Chris had gone out. Then he paced back again, right past the house, and hung about in all for quite five minutes; at the end of which time, the quarry was out of reach and could not be traced.

It was a matter of much difficulty to find a taxi and proceed as fast as possible to a small shop facing the main entrance of Carisbrook Mansions. The man who had been left on duty at this point reported that he had seen no gentleman enter in the company of a young lady, nor one who carried an attaché case, or any long roll of paper. Various people had come in and gone out. In fact, so many that he had got a bit muddled.

A gentleman home on leave, with a huge kit bag and so on, had driven up in a taxi. He could not say which flat

he had gone into. Five young ladies had gone in, seven elderly and three quite old. Four maidservants had gone to the post and back. Three tradesmen had left goods. Five gentlemen had also entered, of whom three had not again emerged. More closely questioned, he could only say that "they looked like residents." The gentleman on leave was an Anzac. He was sure of that.

Ritter began to suppose himself bested, after all. In his mind had floated from the first the notion that the pocketbook might have been baited and left as a trap for Eleanor. The mere fact of her known friendship with himself must make even so casual a man as Blundell suspicious. If his fears were true, then the plans were safe by now—carried off to some destination which he had no means of tracing.

He was half inclined to abandon the idea of breaking into the flat that night when one of his subordinates came up and told him that the man on duty, further pressed, had confessed to having "passed a remark or two" with one of the maids who had come out to post letters. The questioner gathered that he had turned his back for a minute or two in order to stroll to the pillar box with her, since she had told him that she had something queer to tell him of the goings-on in the flats, and he had hoped to get some information. The girl was clearly making a fool of him, since she had no information to give, beyond some nonsense about a chimney on fire, and it was quite possible that, during this momentary inattention, Mr. Blundell and Mrs. Holderness might have slipped in.

Ritter was hardly inclined to give the inhabitants of Carisbrook Mansions credit for such subtlety. However, it was easy enough to ascertain whether Mrs. Holderness was in her flat or not. A messenger was dispatched to the

nearest public telephone, to ring her up and ask, on behalf of John Smith & Co., whether she had ordered a dozen of whisky.

This man brought back the news that Mrs. Holderness had been called to the telephone and had denied the order with some asperity.

Now, if Mrs. Holderness and Blundell had got in, and if they had for this purpose arranged that their maid should act as a decoy and distract the attention of the man on duty, then there was no doubt of their being more on the alert than Ritter had foreseen. In that case, the passers-by in Studio Lane were not a coincidence. The plans for which Potsdam would give so much were actually in the flat, and unless he got them that night, he would never get them, for to clash with the government emissaries who might come next morning to fetch them was the last thing he desired.

His deliberations, it should be stated, took place in a small room on the first floor of the house opposite Carisbrook Mansions—the waiting room of a dentist, who let it after business hours to the soi-disant emissary of an American firm whose commercial travelers came to him there to present reports, during the short period that must elapse before the London business was on so secure a footing as to possess premises of its own.

As Ritter sat in the window of this coign of vantage, brooding, cogitating, his eyes, fixed absently upon the front door of the Mansions, saw something of interest. It was not yet by any means dark, and Blundell was distinctly visible as he came out and stood in the entrance. He carried no attaché case or package of any kind. Neither did he seem in any haste, nor at all suspicious that his movements might be of interest to any one. He pulled out his case of cigarettes, selected one, found a match, lit it, and then sauntered de-

liberately down the street, pausing, when he reached a tube station, to buy an evening paper, which he opened and was reading as he passed out of sight.

Ritter bit his lip.

All turned now upon the ability of his brain to defeat that of his adversary. Was Blundell clever or was he merely lucky? The carrying of the plans safely away from Memling



Rolf, at her entrance, had leaped to his feet.

House, the entering of Carisbrook Mansions unseen, the action of the maid with his spy, all might be just lucky coincidence. A man who is completely unsuspecting may sometimes march calmly through a place where a man

who fears danger at every turn may court disaster.

If this was a trap—if Ritter walked into it—it was the end of all things for him. On the other hand, if the plans could not be got, he was registered a failure at headquarters.

And to-night was his only chance!

If he could but see into that flat and ascertain what was going on!

Just two women in a flat alone!

It all sounded so easy. Was Blundell counting upon that? Or was he not?

Suddenly an idea darted into his mind. Seizing the telephone, he rang up Eleanor Carmichael.

"Are you there? Is it Miss Carmichael speaking?"

"Yes, it is I. Is that you, Max?"

"Are you alone? Anybody else in the room?"

"Nobody."

"Well, then, see here. Is there any excuse that would make it seem natural for you to go to Carisbrook Mansions this evening after dinner?"

"Mercy, no! What could I go for? I never did such a thing in my life! They'd smell a rat directly."

"Are you sure? Think! Isn't there something? Ah, yes, by Jove! A rumor from the front! Couldn't you have heard something? That would do it! Some rumor to the effect that Captain Holderness had been blown to bits by a shell! You rush round there to know if it's true, because you loved him once and you're half distracted."

"You beast!" said Eleanor quietly at her end of the wire.

"Quite so. But don't waste time. Try to grasp the idea. Could you carry it off?"

"Conceivably. But why do you want me to go there?"

"I want to know what they're doing—whether the two women are alone, whether they seem to have the jumps at all or whether they're just going on as usual. I confess that Blundell is worry-



She came in, stopped short, and stood there in the early sunlight, taking in the miracle of her husband's presence. All her soul seemed to have passed into her eyes.

ing me a little. I want to know whether he's there or expected. If you drop in about nine o'clock, say?"

"No, I'm hanged if I do! Give that wretched girl the shock of her life!"

"Give her the joy of her life. She'll think she's free to encourage old Blitz. It'd be fine to watch 'em both take the news—if he's there."

"If Blitz were there, he'd see through me."

"Stuff and nonsense! He'd take anything you handed out to him."

"If you really believe that, Max, you're not fit to run this show."

"That's a question that time must prove. Now remember, you've just got this news by post. Have a bit of a letter, scrawled on this thin paper they use in the trenches, with a bit of old pencil. Even if your visit does no other good, it'll be an excellent thing, for it'll take the Chris girl's mind off her work and shatter her a bit. I've known quite a good conspirator break down before now, under the pressure of sudden bad news connected with her best boy. Anyway, you do it, my girl. I wish it. Do you hear?"

There was a ring of command in the voice, like that in the tones of an animal trainer who will coax just so long as he believes the whip not to be necessary. Eleanor, though she winced under it, held out for a while. Her ultimate surrender was, nevertheless, a foregone conclusion.

CHAPTER IX.

In Jane's studio, the chill of that sleety, gusty night of an English spring was enlivened by the comforting warmth of a fire. Round it were seated five persons—Jane herself, strung up to a pitch of some excitement, Chrissie Holderness, Blundell, the Anzac who had that afternoon been seen to enter the Mansions, and one of those persons whom the watcher could only describe as "residents," though this one

did not happen to be a tenant in that particular block of flats.

The maid employed by the two ladies did not sleep in the flat. She came each morning in time to get breakfast, and left, as a rule, after laying the evening meal. The remains of a picnic supper lay about in the studio on various tables and ottomans. Chris had just risen and was piling up the dirty plates in order to carry them to the scullery when a ring was heard at the door of the flat.

Silence fell for a moment—a breathless silence, while they all looked at one another. It was the "resident" who spoke first, in a subdued voice:

"Have you any idea as to who that might be, Miss Lockett?"

Jane, inclined to be tremulous, was calmed by his serious air.

"None at all, Mr. Mellor," said she. "It's probably quite unimportant. Some one to collect a bill or the like. But on the supposition that it may be some one whom you can't well avoid admitting, I'll ask that you and Mrs. Holderness go into her sitting room and make it look as if you were passing the evening there. We'll switch all the lights out here and remain quite silent. We'll also lock ourselves in when you ladies leave the room, in case anybody might inadvertently open a door. I've known such things to happen. Let Mrs. Holderness go to the door. Now, Miss Lockett, are you prepared to carry off the situation if necessary? Do you guarantee your nerve?"

Jane stood there, looking white. Quantities of words were on the tip of her garrulous tongue—foolish surmises as to who the visitor could be—but the look on the faces of the others steadied her into silence.

"I'll ask you to trust me," she said simply, and Blitz murmured softly, "Bravo, old sport!"

Chris, with lightning speed, had been collecting a couple of cups and plates,

a tin of milk, and one of cocoa. As she turned to the door, Mellor softly begged her to wait until he had switched off the lights.

"There are glass panes in the front door. The stream of light might be seen by some one standing outside."

Noiselessly the two women fled, lit up the other sitting room, and Chris dragged out some work and flung a book or two into prominence before hurrying to the door and opening it. She could not have told what or whom she expected to find without, but most certainly the apparition of Eleanor was a complete surprise. She was looking gloriously handsome, but half distracted. She wore an evening gown of a rich blue and a wrap incrustated with gold embroidery and edged with sable.

At sight of Chris, she uttered a hysterical cry, darting in and catching her by the wrists.

"Then you haven't!" She wrenched the other round so that the light fell full upon her face. "You haven't heard? You don't know? Ah, thank God! It can't be true!"

Chris turned pale as death. She fell back against the panels of the locked studio door.

"What is it? What can't be true?" she cried.

Eleanor burst into speech:

"I didn't mean to come! I couldn't help it! Forgive me! Forgive me! You must think me raving mad! I know you will—you do! But this was so awful, so crushing, so *unbearable*!"

With which she allowed Chris to snatch from her hand the bit of crumpled, apparently tear-blotted paper with its fatal news. She continued to babble out excuses and entreaties—even at the risk of being put outside the door, she must come where she could hear a human voice, have a touch of sympathy—

Chris, shaking from head to foot, stood there and read, feeling a numb-

ness steal upward to her brain as if to paralyze her alertness and put her caution and her suspicions to sleep.

Suppose the secret police had not insisted upon those precautions! Suppose they had allowed old Jane to go blundering to the door to be met by a blow like this!

Mingled with her agony, there struggled in her the determination not to be overwhelmed. Even at that poignant moment, she was able to see how much her own collapse might mean at this crisis. There was a wild, insurgent hope that possibly the news was fabricated with that intent—a hope rejected as soon as formed. Eleanor had loved Rolf, and must, therefore, be incapable of such baseness as that.

She conquered her sick shuddering and pulled herself together.

Eleanor, when she had seemed about to fall, had flung her arm behind her to support her, and they were standing thus, close together, right against the studio door. With her free hand, Eleanor turned the handle and pushed.

"Why," said she swiftly, "this door is locked!"

"Yes. We always lock it at night. We are alone in the flat, and there's a way along the leads—into that room. We think it's safer. Come this way. Jane and I sit in my room of an evening."

As she led in the visitor, Jane rolled off the couch, yawning and dropping her novel to the floor.

"Whatever is the matter, Chris? You seem very excited over something. Hello! Miss Carmichael!"

She was on her feet, and Chris wondered at her doing it so well.

"Miss Carmichael brings terrible news," she managed to say, and turned away shivering with the effort to control herself. She was brought round completely, however, by the effect of the news upon Jane, who burst into agonies of weeping, while Eleanor, hav-

ing glanced all about her and finding no sign of any unusual perturbation in the normal course of the two women's lives, renewed her apologies and began to declare that she was sure the rumor must be unfounded; otherwise Mrs. Holderness would have had a telegram from the war office.

She was eager to be gone, for her mission had sickened her. Yet, even in her repugnance, she realized how clever Max had been. That attempt on her part to enter the studio had told her what she had come to find out. She had no doubt at all that the plans were there, and the window was accessible from the leads, just as Ritter's man had alleged. Chris doubtless knew all about the plans. Jane as evidently did not. They both imagined themselves to be quite safe and unwatched.

Eleanor escaped as soon as she was decently able, earnestly begging that if they received any news, they would let her know at once.

She left behind her a Chris who hardly knew herself. As she fastened the flat door after her visitor, she was staring into her own heart, aghast at what she found there. She had supposed that, if Rolf should fall in the war, it would be a providential means of escape for her. And now—now it seemed to her that, from beginning to end, she and he had misunderstood the whole situation, and that they could never explain, never unravel the problem of their mistake.

She was forgetting everything, except that final moment in his arms—that moment upon which she was constantly assuring herself that she must not build any hope.

She was sick and shivering as she dragged herself back to the room where the men were hidden, tapped upon the door, and begged them to admit her without making a light.

It was about two o'clock in the morn-

ing when Captain Holderness reached Carisbrook Mansions.

He carried only a hand bag, for he could obtain no vehicle and had checked his luggage at Waterloo. He had dispatched a telegram from Southampton, and, not being familiar with the present state of the telegraphic service in his native land, he made no doubt that he was expected. It was, therefore, no surprise at all to him when he found the hall porter on the watch, though he was gratified by the noiseless rapidity with which he was admitted.

The man, who was either but half awake or had been solacing his vigil with something stronger than water, glanced at his khaki with a sly grin, and said, as if it were a joke:

"Anzac, ain't you?"

To this question, which appeared to Rolf to be obviously derisive, he naturally replied, "Not 'alf!"—which appeared to be a highly satisfactory repartee, for the inner door was at once opened, the man even winking at him and muttering very softly:

"Fourth floor. I daren't take the lift up this time o' night, as you may guess. Better go up without your boots, eh, young feller?"

Apart from the lack of respect to an officer disclosed in this address, the bootless idea seemed rather on the side of overdoing one's considerations for the slumbers of the inhabitants. But if the porter deemed it advisable, Rolf had no objection. The stairs were nicely carpeted, and his boots were distinctly reminiscent of the trenches.

As he sat on the lowest stair unlatching them, the porter tiptoed up to him and whispered:

"Door's unfastened. Just turn the 'andle. It'll open without a sound."

"One would think burglary was the idea," was the inward reflection of the young officer, but he nodded comprehendingly, found a shilling which

seemed to give not only pleasure, but surprise, and then, boots in one hand and haversack in the other, he noiselessly mounted to the fourth floor.

It was a little puzzling to hear that the flat had been left open for him to enter. It seemed to infer that no one was waiting up to receive him, and this cheerless forecast gained strength as he arrived and saw no glimmer of light through the half-glazed door.

As he mounted the endless stairs, his shyness had increased, and now that he actually stood upon his wife's threshold, he halted, and the perspiration broke out upon him.

Everything was so still—not a sound in that great range of bricks and mortar, which he knew to be packed with people on every floor. The silence was somehow dreadful. He got the notion that some one hidden and stealthy was awaiting him—just pausing till he should turn the handle of the door before springing upon him.

CHAPTER X.

Could this be the wrong number? He glanced at the gilt digits, faintly illumined by the glimmer of gas on the staircase. It was No. 6 all right.

But, in any case, he could put it to the proof by turning the handle. If the porter had been instructed to let him know that the door was on the latch, it seemed that, for some reason unknown to him, he was not to knock or ring.

He had come home full of indecision and embarrassment, eager to do all he could to atone, but extremely doubtful as to how much he would be allowed to attempt. Chris' letters had been discouraging—self-contained, full of a dignity for which he had not been prepared.

He had long ago admitted to himself that he had not understood her. He was willing to set himself to the task of learning, if she would permit.

What he hoped for, but dared not expect, was some sudden melting—some uprush of sentiment at the sight of him which might move her as she had been moved when they had parted and make everything easy. Standing there, bootless, upon a particularly prickly coco-fiber mat, he foresaw little chance of any such thing.

Seeking in his mind for some explanation of the silence, the darkness, the absence of welcome, he could only suppose that his wife's daily labors were of so arduous a character as to render unbroken sleep necessary for her at night. The idea of the nonarrival of his telegram did not suggest itself, since the porter had evidently been on the lookout for him.

After some miserable minutes of indecision, he suddenly made up his mind. He had been given explicit directions. He was to open the door for himself. He did so. The door gave without a sound. He stepped in, also without a sound, put down his boots, and stood listening.

The air was warm, after the drafty staircase, and a breath of the scent of hyacinths traveled to his weary senses like the greeting of home. All was still, however, and all was absolutely pitch dark. He had no idea of the internal structure of the flat, nor did he know where to find the switches. He stood for some ridiculous moments, passing his hand up and down the wall and realizing that he was in a space of no great width. Then he bethought him of his electric torch, found it, and set his thumb upon the button.

The light revealed a passage, perhaps twelve feet long, which led to a square vestibule, or lounge, of no great size, but considerably wider than the place in which he stood. It struck him, idiotically, that there were unseen persons stationed behind the angles of the wall on either hand, so that when he moved forward, he would be caught.

This feeling was so strong and so unaccountable—the whole situation seemed to him so unaccountable—that he remained where he was for quite an appreciable time, seeking to steady his mind.

Suddenly it occurred to him that some message might have been left for him, and he glanced quickly to his right, where a narrow table stood against the wall, holding a tray for visiting cards. In the tray was a slip of paper, and upon it were written these words:

"Walk straight on and open second door on the right."

A curious thrill succeeded his late gloom. *Was this her message?* His heart began to hammer furiously. He forgot that he was weary, hungry, heartsick, travel-worn, and unkempt. He thought only of what lay before him, of what he might find if he obeyed those directions—a haven of refuge, a welcome, shy, secret, exquisite—something that would put an end forever to the nightmare in which his soul had wandered ever since his wedding day.

There sprang up in his heart, as if some one had drawn back a curtain, the face of his wife as Blundell had painted her. The portrait had been reproduced in several illustrated papers, and he had cut out more than one copy. He seemed to see her soft mouth and pleading eyes—her child's face, eloquent of such mystery, such high promise, that he felt at one and the same moment the lover's sense of unworthiness and the lover's determination to win.

He glanced to right and left. No doors opened from the entrance passage. The second door on the right must be in the vestibule. As he stepped forward, torch in hand, he saw them both, demurely closed. He approached the second with his heart in his throat, and had almost gained the threshold when he saw that it was opening slowly from within.

His pent-up excitement released it-

self in a sound—a low cry—but it was snapped off short and sharp. And then everything happened in an instant.

He became aware, in a horrible moment, that the person who was creeping with infinite stealth from the room he sought was Blundell. The light of the torch showed him with awful clearness, but left the face of Rolf in deepest shadow. Just as his call of love was changing to a growl of fury, Blundell sprang upon him, and simultaneously some one else gripped him from behind and stifled all sound with an iron arm across his mouth. There was no noise but a soft shuffling. It seemed to him that his assailants were at least three in number, and though he fought and writhed, he could not prevent them from pushing him through the door into the room—where they tied him up and gagged him with ease and dexterity. The silence of it all made the thing incredibly daunting. Fatigue, overstretched nerves, hunger, and furious resentment combined to send the blood to his heart in a flood that wiped out consciousness. As he slipped off helpless into the void, he heard low whispers pass between his captors:

"Jove, that was a near thing!"

"Nearer than you think! St! There goes the signal!"

Then all tailed off into uttermost silence.

Rolf opened his eyes at last to a consciousness of daylight. His faint had doubtless passed into the sleep of exhaustion. He lay on his back upon a kind of divan, not very uncomfortable, and stared up at the ceiling. He was tied with flat strips of canvas, which did not cut, but were extremely rigid. He could, however, move his head from side to side, and began to examine his surroundings.

The room in which he found himself was not a bedroom. For some reason,

which at the moment he was unable to remember, this fact gave him pleasure. He remarked with some surprise that upon the walls hung two or three of his own best oils. The general effect of the furnishing charmed him, and all the more when he reflected that it was probably Chris' own sitting room. Then where was Chris herself?

Were burglars in possession of the flat, as he had fantastically supposed overnight? Was she lying, gagged and bound, in some other apartment? To oppose any such notion, there came to him sharply the memory of his glimpse of the face of Blundell—hawklike, vindictive, triumphing.

He thought he saw a solution. His wife and Blitz had decided to go away together. But something must have interrupted their arrangements. Perhaps his telegram?

Blitz must have returned to make final dispositions, to leave directions for him, to see that he was admitted—and as he, Rolf, had got home earlier than had been foreseen, it had seemed to Blitz necessary to dispose of him forcibly.

His methods had been ungentle, to say the least of it. And since when had Blitz commanded a band of desperadoes?

"If I had known how things were, I'd have stood on one side," he thought miserably, and mentally kicked himself for not having realized the position before. Blitz had fallen in love with Chris at first sight. The portrait he had achieved was a proof of the strength of his passion. Rolf had known it the moment his eye had met that of his former friend in the light of his electric torch.

He was ravenously hungry. How long was he likely to have to lie here, trussed up and ravenous? He guessed it to be very early morning, judging from the slant of a sunbeam that streamed through the window.

Then, like a reprieve, he heard the sound of voices. A door somewhere had opened, and a sound as of several people in animated discussion traveled out and seemed to approach. He caught such fragments as:

"Good-by, good-by! We may congratulate ourselves, I think!"

"Neat, wasn't it?"

Then a deep male voice: "Mr. Blundell did the best, though."

A feminine note—surely Jane Lockett?

"What do you say? Sent one of them up the public staircase?" and after a resultant babel of chatter: "What? Left the creature in Chris' parlor? Oh, really!"

Blitz said something, laughing. Blitz seemed to be on the crest of the wave. His voice was hilarity personified. Then at last the handle of the door turned. Several people were entering. A strange voice remarked:

"Jove! Another one in khaki! That's their favorite game."

"Oh, poor chap!" in Jane's kind tones. The actual sight of the prostrate foe evidently melted her at once. "Untie him at once, please!"

Two persons came forward; two strange men bent over the young officer and began to release his aching limbs. Then, with a startled cry, Blundell strode forward. The eyes of the two men met, and there was something in Rolf's that turned his friend as white as paper.

"Jane!" he gasped chokingly. "Jane! What have we done? Look here! It's—it's Holderness!"

There was a stupefied silence, lasting perhaps three ticks of the clock. Then Jane rushed to the divan, flung her arms about Rolf, lifted his head to her shoulder, and with shaking hand began to stroke his hair.

"Oh, my boy, my poor, dear boy! What have they done to you?" she cried, shaken with feeling. Then,

checking herself suddenly, "Blitz! Blitz! On your life, keep this from Chris until he's come to himself again. It'd kill her to see him like this, on top of all she's just gone through! Rolf, dear boy, there's been some ghastly mistake! Speak to me! D'you know old Jane?"

"Water!" he managed to gasp, and in a moment every one was on the move, hastening to obtain relief for him. Hot milk was fetched, and he was made comfortable with a pile of cushions and an eiderdown snatched off somebody's bed, while Jane chafed one of his cold feet and Blitz the other.

After an interval, Jane looked up from her ministrations to beg the chief of the secret police to take his men to the kitchen and keep Mrs. Holderness busy there, making cocoa for them. After they had left the room, Rolf just lay still and did not even think. Jane put a hot-water bottle to his feet and fed him assiduously. After a while, the comfort sent his blood once more circulating through his veins, and his apathy was succeeded by a devouring curiosity.

"What in the name of wonder were you all playing at last night?" he asked faintly.

"My dear, we were spy-catching," replied Jane willingly. "I'll leave Chris to tell the story, for it's her affair and not mine. Between them, she and Blitz have caught Max Ritter red-handed. I'm feeling pretty bad about it, for it means that he'll be shot out of hand. The secret police have sent men to raid his rooms, which they were never allowed to do before. They ought to shoot the beast who went surety for him, but as he's a member of Parliament, one knows what will happen. The whole transaction will be kept out of the press. Blitz may get a knighthood, but every one will think it's for his painting, and not because he saved a valuable secret for his country."

"Chris," whispered Rolf, after digesting this amazing news. "She's safe?"

"Yes, she's safe. But she had a shock last night. That fiend, Eleanor Carmichael, rushed in to tell her you'd been blown to pieces by a bomb."

He crimsoned.

"Eleanor said that? What the devil did she know about it?"

"Have you," said Blitz in lifeless tones, "been corresponding much with Miss Carmichael?"

"Good heavens, Blitz, what do you take me for? Certainly not!"

"Your wife will be glad to feel sure," replied Blundell, in a voice whose full significance Rolf was at the time far from understanding.

Jane rose to her feet.

"The police are going," she muttered hastily.

"Jane," cried Rolf "for pity's sake keep Chris away until I'm clean! Could one have a bath, by any chance?"

"Geyser," replied Jane promptly. "Ten minutes." She whisked out of the room and the two men were left together.

Blundell sat forward in his chair, staring at the floor. Then, quite suddenly, he straightened himself and met Rolf's eyes like searchlights raking him.

"I think," said Blitz bluntly, "that I'm justified in asking you for a plain answer to a plain question. Do you love your wife? Do you want her? Because, if you don't—well, I do."

"Oh, confound you, Blitz, how dare you talk like that to me?" Rolf sprang to a sitting posture, gathered as if to spring upon his friend.

Blundell did not move, and his eyes met Rolf's quite steadily.

"I've nothing to be ashamed of," he said simply.

"There's the difference between us, for I have," was the slow reply, while the soldier flushed crimson. His voice failed a little, but after a moment, he

went on, "I can't decide, and you can't. It's for her to say. I want her, right enough—if she'll take me. But if she'd rather have you—why, I own you're the better man."

"Yes, I am," returned Blundell coolly. "Only, unfortunately, she loves you, you see."

At the moment, the bell of the flat rang. They heard light footfalls going to the door and the sound of low, suppressed voices in eager talk. Through it pierced a sudden, high note:

"Max! Taken! They've taken him!"

The two men glanced uneasily at each other. Blundell rose to his feet and took one or two steps toward the door. It was flung open at the moment by some one without, and Chrissie Holderness came in, followed by Eleanor Carmichael.

CHAPTER XI.

All his life after, Blundell remembered Chris' face as she came in, stopped short, and stood there in the early sunlight, taking in the miracle of her husband's presence.

Though she had been up almost all night, she was daintily fresh in her rose-colored overalls and delicate collar. Her expression was indescribable; all her soul seemed to have passed into her eyes.

Rolf, at her entrance, had leaped to his feet, but at first he could hardly stand and sank down in a sitting posture upon the edge of the divan, while, for a space in which one might count ten, he and she gazed at each other. He must have seen something in her expression that flung him off his guard. All disheveled as he was, his face still red with the stricture of the gag, he lifted himself, strode stiffly up to his wife as if nobody else had been in the room, and caught her in his arms. His head was so stooped over her that no-

body could see either his face or hers, and with his left arm he drew her toward the door, which he pulled open with his right.

"You'll excuse us, I know," came his voice, in accents muffled by the fact that his mouth was hidden in Chris' hair; and so they passed from sight, and he shut the door after them with a bang.

Eleanor and Blundell were left, staring upon each other.

"Eleanor Carmichael," said Blitz fiercely, "if you meddle there, your soul will go to destruction everlasting!"

She looked at him like a hurt child, and burst into hopeless tears.

"I won't meddle, I won't!" she sobbed. "And it wouldn't be a b-bit of good if I tried. He belongs to her—can't you see it? Why, I've written to him five or six times since he went back to France, each letter more moving than the last, but he's never answered! He's hers, I tell you—hers! And I"—she dried her eyes and spoke with sudden defiance—"I don't mind half as much as I thought I did, because I'm delivered from Ritter."

"Ah!" said Blitz. "I knew it! Then he was blackmailing you?"

She nodded without speaking, sinking down upon a chair as if she could hardly stand.

After a silence she asked, "When did Rolf come?"

Blundell smiled ruefully.

"He got a queer reception, poor lad! We felt fairly certain that Ritter would have bought the porter, so as to pass another man into the flat or have him ready just outside in case of any unlooked-for struggle. One of our men found out that they'd told the porter that Mrs. Holderness' husband was coming home suddenly and wanted to take his wife by surprise—he would arrive in khaki and the word would be 'Anzac.'"

"We decided that this program

should be carried out, as we could trap the man so introduced quite neatly; and we put a message in the hall, directing him where to go when he got in. Holderness must have arrived at the critical moment, and the porter, having admitted him, doubtless went straight to bed and never heard the real man knock. We were all lying in wait, and poor old Rolf was gagged and trussed up before he had time to make a sound. As the marauders entered from the leads almost immediately after, we hadn't time to examine our captives. We were too busy."

"Max risked coming in person?"

"He had to, for the reason that he could trust nobody else to decide whether the plans were bogus or genuine. He had a strong notion that I was on to him, but couldn't be sure. He thought I might have left a decoy set of plans lying about. So he came himself, to make certain, and so I fear he has looked his last upon the sun. Well, he was a brave man, and he died for his country. May his sins be forgiven him!"

"I can't—I can't—pray that yet," muttered Eleanor. "But I'll try, Blitz—I'll try—because I'm a free woman now."

Rolf had not in the least meant to act so precipitately. He had every in-

tention of remaining calm and detached, and telling his wife nobly that she must do as she thought right—and as her own heart dictated. But the mere sight of her, with those pathetic eyes still shadowed with the purple undermarkings of last night's weeping, scattered all his presence of mind.

He only knew that she was there and that he must have her—must win her at any cost. When they found themselves alone together in the passage, he gave her not a moment in which to call him to order; he spoke without a second for reflection.

"Am I to go or stay? You must decide, this instant. If you let me stay, even five minutes—if you let me kiss you—even once—you'll have to put up with me for the remainder of your life! But if you'd rather have Blundell——"

Jane, hurrying to announce to her patient that his hot bath was ready, found the passage blocked by a tableau that almost deprived her for the moment of sense or speech. She had just enough presence of mind to turn and bolt, scurrying away and into the first open door she found, which was, as it happened, the scullery.

"Anywhere to be out of their way," she muttered. "Oh, dear, everything seems to have come at once! I feel unstrung. However, so long as it's all right— And thank God, it is! It is!"

WAR

WE'D not have had the grit to be in love

Had not war given a shove

To our slow cautiousness, and made us know

That there is no to-morrow anywhere—

That those who care

Should not take chances so.

And so we married, and you went away

To fight. And I am glad we didn't wait.

How queer it is to think it should be hate

And bitterness that gave the shove

That pushed us into love!

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES.



The MENACE of THE MIDDLE-AGED MAN

by VIRGINIA MIDDLETON

Author of "How Often Can One Love?" "Shall She Marry Her Soldier?" etc.

The mothers of two young men discuss a social problem that has been touched by the war.

IN the Victorian days of English literature, anxious mothers were always represented as worrying about younger sons as "detrimentals." The lovely Lady Agatha, the sparkling Edith, were forever being dragged from the conservatories in which they listened to the honeyed nothings of young men with no settled incomes. Mothers were always pointing out to them the desirable qualities of ancient gentlemen with rheumatic joints and large rent rolls. It was always and only the young man who was darkly and suspiciously frowned upon by matchmakers.

How far has the American mother progressed from that tradition? A considerable distance, if one may take as representative a dialogue overheard not long ago at a country club near New York, where a group of women, busy with war knitting, worked and kept an eye upon the arrivals from the golf field.

"How I hate old men!" cried one, as a gentleman of some fifty well-preserved autumns approached the piazza by the side of a young woman of twenty-one or two. "Yes, I do, too,

mean it! And I'm perfectly aware of the fact that I'm forty-three—and that I look every hour of my age. It isn't of myself, or just of old age, that I'm thinking—"

"But how absurd!" one of the listeners gained breath to ejaculate. "Haven't you a husband? Haven't we all husbands? And are any of them young any longer? How dreadful to say that you hate old men! They're not decrepit, of course, our husbands, but even if they were—"

"Yes, I know! Even if they were, haven't a good many of us aged fathers who are full of wisdom and full of the charm of mellow years? And do I hate them? No, of course I don't hate them. It's only the old men—that is, the not young men—who are still in the matrimonial, or the love-making, markets that I hate. I hate them with a twofold hatred! I hate them as the mother of a son and as the mother or a daughter."

"I understand you," said another mother of a son, nodding sagely.

"Of course you do. There's your boy, Dick; there's my boy, Tom; there's every other mother's son, Harry.

Where are they all? In France, in Texas, in Spartanburg. And here are all the old men—not the decrepit old, as you reminded me, one of you, but the old men who are able to stay here with their skins perfectly safe, their incomes a trifle reduced by war taxes, perhaps, but still discernible. And along with them are staying all the lovely young girls whom our boys adore, or think that they adore.

"And those girls are excited emotionally. Ten to one, they're engaged to your boy or mine in France or Spartanburg or wherever it may be. They may not have presented the matter for family consideration and approval yet, but there's what my grandmother used to call 'an understanding.' That means that they're all the more excited emotionally. They're ripe, they're tremulous—ready to drop before a practiced touch upon the bough.

"And who is here to give that practiced touch? The middle-aged man! I tell you, I hate the middle-aged man whenever I see him enjoying the precious thing that my boy Tom and some other mother's boy Dick has had to give up—the companionship of a lovely girl, the romantic thoughts of a girl. Oh, I tell you I hate it all!"

"They're so attractive to young girls, too," moaned another mother of a son. "They were even when I was a girl myself."

"Of course they were! They have been since the beginning of time! They've had experience—they know the world. Every middle-aged man who isn't a dullard is to the young girl what Othello was to Desdemona. He represents to her experience. She thrills over the dangers he has passed. She may pretend to be as modern and sophisticated as she pleases—and that will be very modern and sophisticated indeed—but she'll still have, in the depths of her heart, the sense of his adventures when he talks to her. She'll

be flattered. His glances will mean more to her than my Tom's crude fervor or your Dick's crude poetry. She'll consider herself a person of finished taste to appreciate him. And though, in normal times, when there are lots of boys around to wake up the real youth that is in every girl's heart, it doesn't make such a lot of difference about these practiced fascinatators, the middle-aged detrimental, it's very different now!

"A man who is a bachelor at forty," she pursued, turning a heel with practiced skill, "is either one of two things—he's either abnormally faithful to some ideal or he's selfish and timorous. He's either the one man in all the world who prefers the remembrance of a lost love to the actuality of a new one—and we needn't count him among the detrimental in that case—or he's a man who was afraid of the adventure of matrimony at the age when its call is most insistent.

"He may be ready for it now. He may have attained the ambition that was more potent than nature and custom twenty years ago, or he may have definitely given it up. In either case, he's probably attained an income that will enable him to marry without fear of the sacrifices which two young people face when they marry. I tell you, I hate to see such a man dance with my daughter, play golf with her, engage in talk. To me a bachelor at forty is a confessed coward and egotist, and I hate to think that he may delude my child with a middle-aged sham of young love.

"Forty, as I see it, is the beginning of the dangerous age for men. Oh, yes, they have their dangerous age as well as women. And one of its manifestations, with them as with us—generally totally unconscious in both cases, of course—is a frantic grasping after the things of youth. In their middle-aged ears, as in ours, sounds the last

call for romance, for ardor. And so they approach our young daughters, and they woo them with experienced charm, and we, Heaven forgive us, more concerned about assured incomes than about lasting passion, give them our blessing!

"They marry and they settle down. They've had their fling and they're through. They've had their cake and they've eaten it, too—or so they fondly imagine. They've had their safety and their freedom. They've had their gratifications and their romance. And now they're ready for a secure domesticity. But their young wives, twenty or twenty-five years younger—are they so ready for the chimney corner? Hardly! And there begins the vicious circle again—the middle-aged masculine charmer has intrigued the fancy of a girl young enough to be his daughter. Having won her, he settles down. But she doesn't. And she wanders the earth, socially speaking, seeking whom she may devour. She becomes the siren for callow youths, and steals away the first fruits of their young devotion from the girls to whom those fruits properly and normally belong."

"But you can't blame the middle-aged husband for the flirtatiousness of a light-minded young wife," objected a listener.

"I'm not blaming any individuals. I'm only hating a system. And it's a system that I think is in danger of more expansion just at present than it has ever been before in this country. Except those of us—and they are comparatively few—who figure in the Sunday paper as the 'socially elect' and in the Reverend Billy Sunday's denunciations as the spiritually damned, we're all still near enough to pioneer conditions to have been, up to this time, fairly normal in our mating. Youth has, for the most part, fallen in love with youth, and has married youth, and has dared poverty and unsuccess and

all the grim things that *may* possibly happen to people whose incomes and careers aren't already assured. But now, with all the boys gone, and with all the girls more eager, more emotional, than ever before, and with all the eligible middle-aged men granted a free field—why, as I said in the beginning, I simply hate middle-aged men!"

"But what's to be done about it?" wailed the mother of a son. "Even if the war ends in a few years—a few months, if you please—it's going to take them ages and ages to establish themselves in civil life, all the boys who've gone out of it for this great service and adventure. They won't be able to compete with these selfish, cautious, epicurean, middle-aged men of your detestation for ever so long. Are the girls to forego marriage? What's to be done about it? We talk and talk, but where do we get with all our talking?"

"It's only an intensification of the economic problem that we have with us always, I suppose," thoughtfully said the woman who hated middle-aged men. "It brings it home to more of us—that's all. Boys and girls are emotionally and physically ready for marriage such years and years before they're ready for it economically—or intellectually. One might as well face that honestly."

"At eighteen or twenty, young people feel more intense and ardent yearnings than they do at twenty-eight and thirty, but it's idle to pretend that they're as fit for choosing life companions as they are at the latter ages. When early marriages turn out permanently congenial, sympathetic, and happy, it's more a matter of good luck than of wisdom. But—how can we manage the one manageable element in the complex problem so as to eliminate as much uncertainty as possible? That's the question. How can we manage the economic problem so as to

allow for reasonably early marriage? That was a question for statesmanship even before the war. What it's going to be after the war is something terrific."

"I think," said the mother of a mere daughter, who had not yet spoken and who had listened with a certain amount of dissent visible on her face, "that I know the answer our friend would give—our friend who hates middle-aged men as the possible rivals of her boy."

"And what is my solution?" asked that lady, a little tartly.

"The economic independence of wives, either through their ability to support themselves or through state pensions for mothers. Am I not right?"

"I haven't got it all so neatly arranged as that," confessed the woman who hated middle-aged men. "But I think the time has come when parents must face the fact honestly that if they cling to the good old American custom of allowing boys and girls to grow up together, to fall in love, and to base their marriages on love, they must provide some economic solution of the difficulties in the way of early-

love marriages. We might, of course, adopt the system of some of our Allies and bestow on our daughters a *dot* to help in establishing the new home and to give them the dignity of financial independence.

"If we don't do that, we certainly ought to equip them with the means of maintaining their share of the economic burden. We must give them professions, and, besides, must give them a society in which their practice of their profession after marriage is not regarded as freakishness. And we must tell them the truth, so far as we know it, about attraction and ardor and all the rest of it—just enough to keep them from eloping to the marriage-license bureau at fifteen, you know, not enough to spoil love for them when it comes along at twenty!

"I think, if all those things were already in force now, I shouldn't feel such bitterness of soul every time I see a safe, sound, prosperous, middle-aged man talking to the girl who has just knit six pairs of socks for my son Tom. He wouldn't seem to me such a formidable rival for my boy then, you see!"



LOVE SONG

O SKYLARK singing above the clouds,
Sing, sing to my dear for me!
Tell him my love is as heaven's height
And as deep as the depth of the sea!

O golden bloom on the hedgerow tall,
Grow fair for my love and me,
For we are one with the laughing spring
And our hearts beat merrily!

Sing out, full-throated little birds,
High up in the poplar tree!
We are shod with the flaming winds of dawn
And wild as the wind are we!

ELINOR CHIPP.

Milady Coward

By Angie Ousley Rosser

Author of "Jimmy Convers Strikes an Accidental," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY VICTOR PERARD

In Danvers the story is still told as a case of "love at first sight." But was it?

HE was falling—falling—
All consciousness of time or surrounding circumstances escaped him. Life had become simply a state of continuous falling. Certainly he must hit something very soon. Even in nightmares one didn't fall forever.

Presently oblivion.

Then a noisy confusion, the exact sound of which seemed to elude him. After that, more falling—dizziness—and a tautness of muscles that made him clutch at the bedclothes.

Bedclothes! Then of course it was nothing but a dream! Came the muffled sound of voices—a single voice. And this voice was the voice of all the world. He could not be mistaken. Not in a thousand years could he forget the husky cadences of that voice, surrounded as it had been by the mysteries of chance and the dark of the moon. Only this much he knew—the voice had a name. It was Nan.

The first time Henry Brickridge heard Nan's voice was one warm night in early October, somewhere near the Texas coast. The roads had been bad out of Galveston, execrable after he reached the mainland, and he had had much tire trouble. Consequently it was after twelve o'clock when he rounded the turn at Halfway House. A car with no lights was at the turn, and a strong hand was sounding the Klaxon at regular intervals. Brickridge assumed that this was merely for warning, but, mindful of an unwritten code

of the road, he stopped to ask if assistance were needed.

"Thanks, old chap!" a boy's brisk voice replied from the shadows by the side of the car. "We're in the middle of a pretty bad fix. Had a bad blow-out and haven't an extra tire or tube. Battery's on the blink, too, but maybe, if you've got an extra tube you could let me have, and wouldn't mind backing up so I could have your lights to tinker by——"

The voice trailed off dubiously. Evidently the boy was overwhelmed by the magnitude of his difficulty. There was the sound of a flat tire being kicked.

Brickridge explained that his own recent difficulties had left him unequipped to render the aid required.

"It isn't more than eight miles to the Dickenson garage," he proposed. "I'll be glad to take you there. You can get a tire, and the trouble man can bring you back."

"Will you?" the boy asked gratefully. "That's fine, then!" Already he was clambering onto Brickridge's running board. "Sit tight, Nan," he cried to the other person in the car, "and honk the horn so nobody will run into you in the dark."

"Was it a lady with you?" Brickridge inquired casually as he drove away. "Won't she be afraid?"

"Nan afraid?" The boy beside him laughed. "Not Nan! She can take care of herself."

But, to Brickridge, the idea of a

woman alone at that hour, completely at the mercy of any passing group of revelers, was disquieting. He slowed the car abruptly.

"You could drive to Dickenson alone couldn't you?" he asked.

"Certainly!" The tone was a boast. "But why?"

"Let me walk back," Brickridge proposed politely, "to keep the lady company. You go on and get your tire. I'll wait at your car."

"All right," the young stranger conceded carelessly. "Tell sis I won't be gone long."

Brickridge wondered, as he paced back the dusty road, why he had yielded to the impulse. If the woman had objected to being left, she would surely have protested. And why, since he was so bent on her protection, hadn't he sent the boy back and gone on for the tire himself? A stranger in his beloved speedster—what a note! And what a heedless young ass the fellow was, allowing a stranger to return in this manner to the woman alone!

And now, he supposed, he must risk frightening her. No doubt she was some grim-visaged spinster with no fear of man in her heart. He coughed as he approached the car, trying to make the sound apologetic as well as reassuring.

A slight mass disassociated itself from the car and stood quietly while he came up.

"Your brother thought," he began, "that I'd better come back and see that you were all right—and all that—while he went on to Dickenson. I—I'm the man who picked your brother up a little while ago!" he added lamely.

"Why, yes," she answered with animation, "I recognize your voice. Isn't it a ghastly black night? It was nice of you to think of coming back. I know, of course, it wasn't Bob who suggested it. He'd never think of it."

She talked in a series of dashes. So

Nan was young! Certainly no grim-visaged spinster could manipulate a mellow contralto with such charm. Despite the dark and the unprecedented situation, she managed to convey an impression of poise and graciousness.

"Sit down—do."

He felt, rather than saw, her gesture of invitation, and together they perched on the running board of the car.

"You weren't afraid, then?" He remembered the calmness of that slight figure as it had awaited his approach.

"Oh, horribly afraid," she admitted readily. "I'd been afraid ever since the moment Bob jumped in your car. I never in my life heard anything so still as this road was after you drove away. Then I was positive something moved in the tall grass there, and I imagined eyes staring at me from all sides—pairs of eyes. I was afraid to stir, and every minute I expected to be pounced on by Something. I was relieved when you came."

"Suppose," he laughed, "I had pounced on you?"

"If I hadn't been too paralyzed," she replied, "I'd have shot you before you pounced. See!" She laid a small automatic on his knee for an instant. "I took that out of the car as soon as I was alone. I'm a dreadful coward, you know, and I was perfectly quaking until I was sure I recognized your voice."

"We were thoughtless to leave you," he apologized, "but I wasn't aware that there was a woman in the car until we drove away. Your brother seemed to think——"

"Oh, Bob!" she said lightly. "Bob never bothers about me. He's had me trailing around after him so long that he treats me exactly as he would another man. That's the penalty I pay for not having been a brother, and I don't half mind. How long will he be, do you suppose? It's really too bad of us to delay you in this way."

"Not more than half an hour," Brick-



"Lieutenant!" she saluted smartly. "You look just as I thought you would," he commented, "even to the dimple—God bless it!"

ridge hazarded, surprised to find himself fostering the hope that it might be longer than that. He enjoyed sitting here with this strange young woman. Her bearing excited his sincerest admiration. No nervous apprehension marred the gracious poise of her manner, and she chatted with him easily.

"It's funny," she commented presently, "not being able to see you. There's a kind of white blur there where I suppose your face is, but you're just a kind of animated voice. Fancy being blind—with every friend merely a voice, and all the world a shifting phonograph record of sounds, only sounds!"

"And instead of remembering the shape of your friend's nose and the slant of his eyebrows," he offered, "you'd only be able to recall the sound of his sneeze."

Nan's laugh was the nicest thing, so far, about the adventure. It was a hearty, throaty contralto—a series of liquid notes and a queer little gurgle. Youth was in it.

"But after all," he added, "there's much you can tell from a voice if you have to. You, for instance. I don't need sight to tell me that you're an athletic young person, slender enough to be addicted to middy blouses."

"Slender," she admitted, "athletic—but not painfully young. What else can you 'see' in my voice?"

"A dimple somewhere," he replied promptly, "and a curl. Your skin is exactly the same color as your laugh—a kind of rich cream, I should say, like magnolia petals, maybe."

"I wonder," she pondered, "whether you're an imagist poet or a writer of advertising booklets."

He shouted at that.

"I sell automobiles," he explained. "That may have some bearing on the matter."

"I can 'see' you, too," she continued the game. "You're brown, like your voice—brown hair and eyes and skin. And your hands look as if they could make things. They're brown, too."

"Hands are brown," he conceded, "but my hair—well, my friends delight in calling me 'Brick.'"

An hour goes swiftly. They were both surprised when Bob returned with a grumbling mechanic. The boy busied himself with the car impatiently, anxious to be off. He thanked Brickridge adequately both for the use of the car and his thoughtfulness about Nan.

"Awfully decent of you," he finished, "and we're both very grateful. Not a bit of use in our keeping you any longer, though. We've hogged too much of your time already. Hope you can get to Houston before morning!"

Nan, too, thanked him, offering him a firm hand when he said good-by.

"Good luck!" she cried. "Good roads!" and she returned with warmth the comradely pressure of his fingers.

He drove away without a backward look, dismissing the pleasant episode with a measure of satisfaction in the part he had played. It was not until afterward—the next day, and the next, and all the days to follow—that he regretted his casual acceptance of their mutual incognito.

He could so easily have learned her name, and where she lived! But how could he have known that her voice would haunt him so, the memory of her laugh so tease his desire for a continuance of her sprightly companionship? It came to him too late that she was *The Desirable*. Had it not been urgent that he return to his factory at once, he would have acted upon his sudden and all but overwhelming impulse to return

to Galveston and look for her there. He left the State with an abiding sense of loss.

And for a year after, Brickridge found himself listening instead of looking. New girls who came within his ken were interesting or not only as their voices resembled or did not resemble the voice his memory cherished. It was absurd of course, but he kept hoping to hear that voice again.

II.

Another fall season had found Brickridge again on the coast for a brief stay, and old hopes were renewed when he motored from Houston to Galveston, again and again. But although his experiences were many, there was no chance meeting which brought him any measure of satisfaction. At Halfway House, once, he slowed down for the turn of the road and then stopped his car. Henry Brickridge was not given to daydreaming, but the angry gentleman who had to stop his own car with dangerous abruptness, in order to avoid a collision, surprised a far-away smile on his face, a smile that disappeared reluctantly as he hurriedly made ready to cease obstructing traffic. He had been thinking of Nan's laugh.

"Cream!" he reminded himself. "Honey! Music! Gosh, why can't I find that girl? A miracle is what I want. O Lord—a miracle! And there hasn't been a miracle in several centuries!"

And then, one night early in April the following spring, the miracle came about. In this wise:

"Take a rest, Brick," his partner had advised. "You're off your feed, and you'll need plenty of pep for the spring drive when our new models are ready. Go South, or North, or wherever it is you do go to rest. You ought to have gone to Florida when I did. You wouldn't be feeling so seedy now."

Brickridge, for a moment of wistful madness, held the thought of returning to Texas, of driving again over that execrable road, of meeting all the Texas girls he could manage to meet—and continuing his absurd quest for a voice. But he grimly decided that he was too old for calf tricks and declared in favor of ten days in the Maine woods. There was a lake he knew of. He would camp there. He started immediately.

Helm Lake, six miles from the railroad, was enterprising enough at most seasons to run an automobile bus line to and from the nearest flag station. But this, Brickridge reflected ruefully, must be too early in the year. There was neither human nor car in sight when he stepped from the local train that afternoon at six-thirty. It had not occurred to him to make arrangements in advance, as he had always before found a machine waiting for the train, and camping outfits were to be procured at the lake.

The train left with disheartening promptness. Brickridge stared after it, whistling mournfully; then started down the road along which the automobile would have come if it had come. His bag was light, and the walk would not be a hard one.

He had done it before, that walk, but unaccountably he lost his way—at the second turning, probably, where he had thought to take the short cut through Malvern Settlement. He missed the settlement, started back for the main road, and missed that too. Dark found him, tired and confused, skirting the edge of an unfamiliar wood. There was no moon, and the black shadows that met him on every hand were not inviting.

He decided to give up until morning. It would be no picnic spending the night here with no equipment and no supper, but he had chocolate bars in his pocket, his light overcoat for cover, and it was

not raining. Upon reaching this conclusion, however, he was delighted to detect the glimmer of a light ahead. Pushing on through a slight clearing, he was able presently to discern the outlines of a bungalow. Somewhere in the rear of the house there was a light, but a definite silence pervaded the place.

Brickridge knocked confidently. At least these people could direct him to the road again. Possibly, if they were any sort of folks, they'd offer to put him up for the night.

At first there was no response, and his second knock was a shade less assured. The lamp at the back of the house was moved then, a door opened and closed, and darkness prevailed. Presently there was a movement in the front room—a chair scraped over the floor, footsteps. He stepped back from the door, waiting for it to be opened. But, instead, a window was lifted and the shutter swung out lightly. Out of the dark came a woman's voice.

"What is it?" she asked evenly. "Is some one there?" It was a soft voice with husky cadences, a throaty contralto.

Brickridge, in the months past, had sometimes wondered if, after all, that voice of the unknown girl in Texas had been so utterly distinctive—whether perhaps his memory had tricked him, whether he would know Nan if he heard her voice again. And this was Maine, some thousands of miles from the Gulf coast, but he knew instantly. Recognition speeded up his heart action, choked his throat, and all but deprived him of speech.

"I—I wish to inquire about a road," he stammered, "the road to Helm Lake. I had it—but I lost it. Was it—is it very far? I trust I haven't disturbed you—or frightened you."

There was a curious, breathless little silence.

"It's two miles across to the road," the voice said at last, slowly. "If you

can find your way to the lane directly back of the house, you can't miss it, in spite of the dark. It's a ghastly black night." A certain lightness of tone in her last remark indicated that she might be feeling her way. Brickridge was exultant.

"Only remember one other equal to

"I knew you the moment you spoke," he declared. "Heaven-sent, what are you doing in Maine?"

"I thought I hadn't forgotten your voice," she said, more conservative than he. "I'm rather good at remembering voices."

"If you only *knew* how many times I've thought of you!" he remarked wildly.

"Have you? Really?" He could sense her eager movement as she leaned nearer across the sill.

"And hunted for you," he continued. "I went back to Galveston



Slender and wistfully lovely in a party gown of shadowy gray, she stood on the stairway and smiled down at him across the heads of her fellow townspeople.

it," he remarked. Then he continued briskly, "I thank you for the directions. Surely I can find the road now. Quite sure you weren't frightened?"

"Horribly frightened," she admitted promptly, with a ripple of laughter that was her official recognition of him. "I'm a coward, you know. But I had my little pistol—and had you pounced, I might have shot."

last fall, and I fairly haunted that road in front of Halfway House."

"What were you looking for?" she asked. "A voice?"

She laughed again. The sound was merely a trickle of humor, a faint echo of the laughter he had remembered. Her voice seemed very tired.

"Please," he begged, "mayn't I come in—just for a moment or two? It isn't

late. Surely you're going to let me see you."

"No, no!" Brickridge was surprised at her abruptness and the new gravity in her tone. "You musn't!"

Her alarm, so disproportionate, chilled his sudden ardor. But she spoke again, contritely.

"Please," she said softly, "I didn't mean to sound so panicky, but I'm just a little tired—and nervous. You see, I'm here alone with my girl cousin, who is ill. Bob left at sundown to fetch a doctor. He had to go to Morriston and can't possibly get back before morning."

"You poor youngster!" Brickridge's concern was heartfelt. "No wonder you were scared! All alone, with a sick girl, in the middle of the woods! But isn't there something I can do, Nan? Why can't I come in and look at her? Perhaps——"

"You can't," she insisted. "I'll tell you why. Alicia has been exposed to epidemic meningitis. We thought the danger had passed when we started up here. But she's really very sick, and Bob is sure that's what the matter with her. Bob warned me not to let any one come into the house. It's appallingly contagious."

"But you," he protested. "Why should you——"

"I've already been exposed," she explained patiently, "and anyhow I've taken the serum. Everybody at home last winter did."

In vain he implored that he was longing to assume the risk. The thought of Nan in this grave situation, alone, racked his every sensibility. There was no knowing how sick the cousin might become before morning. But Nan remained firm, and naturally he could not force the issue.

"And I must be getting back to my patient," she told him, a shade of regret in her voice making the ultimatum a trifle easier. "I'm just mighty sorry

we can't have you as our guest, now that we've met again. And it was dear of you to want to help. I'll never forget it." Out of the window her hand came, groping for his. "Good-by," she said softly.

Brickridge kissed the little hand.

"Good night," he said. "Of course I'm coming back to see you, Nan, and learn your other name. You know I love you, don't you?"

He was sure that he heard her sigh.

"You musn't," she whispered, and again gave him her other hand to hold. Undoubtedly there was a solitaire upon the third finger. "I'm sorry," she breathed.

"I understand," he told her. "Be happy, Nan, be happy."

Lingeringly she drew away her hands and closed the shutter softly.

Brickridge stayed on guard that night, outside the cottage. When, at daylight, he saw two men approaching the house and made sure that one of them was the youthful Bob, he made his way silently to the lane at the back of the house and stolidly tramped toward the road to Helm. Two days later, when he returned to inquire about the sick girl, the house was locked and the windows boarded.

III.

Brickridge received his commission at the first officers' training camp. Later, it was made possible for him to be transferred into the branch of the service that most appealed to him—the aviation corps. Learning to fly was absorbing business. From the ground school in Kansas, he went to Toronto. There was little enough time for him to spend in dreaming of a voice, a voice whose throaty cadences had torn his heart at the last, a voice whose sweetest tones could never be for him. Nevertheless, he hugged the thought that he was to finish his training at one of the Texas fields.

But after he was established at Love Field, the hopelessness of his questing was borne in upon him. From his plane, Texas was as remote as it had been from Toronto. Neither at camp nor flying over level stretches of the surrounding country had he an opportunity to meet the civilian population. His infrequent landings were always made near small towns, and in the curious crowds that swarmed out to watch his maneuvers there was no woman whose face even remotely suggested that she possessed a creamy, honey-sweet, and unforgettable voice.

And now, out of a strange oblivion, came the tones of that voice. Brickridge prayed to his gods that this sleep would last a while. Into his dream stole the consciousness of sore muscles, a stiff arm, and a bandaged head, which seemed to relieve him of any immediate stress of responsibility. Plenty of time for dreams of Nan's voice!

"Good by, doctor," she was saying. "You're sure it's safe to leave him now? I hope that cut in his head doesn't bleed any more. I'm such a coward about blood."

"Hmm!" Brickridge commented clearly. "Milady coward!"

"Listen!" she cried. "He's delirious, doctor!"

"Possibly a little feverish," a man's voice answered briskly. "But there's no danger, Miss Nan. That young man on the bed will be as good as new in two weeks. A miracle, I say!"

A miracle indeed, if this, after all, were something more than a dream! When the doctor left the room, Brickridge decided to open his eyes and discover reality for himself, but was momentarily delayed by the touch of a soft palm on his lids. There was a faint scent of spring flowers, a perfume he remembered as well as the voice. He waited just long enough to prolong the exquisite realization that Chance again had flung her choicest gift in his

path. Then he stirred and opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked, the suggestion of a twinkle in his brown eyes offering apology for the utter banality of that bit of bromidism. His voice sounded weak even to himself.

"You fell." Nan stood close to the bedside and smiled down on him gently. "Remember? You must have lost control of your machine just as you were about to finish that last thrilling drop, and instead of shooting up again, you came on down with a crash—right in our back yard. We were fearfully afraid you were killed. You've been unconscious for an hour, but the doctor, who just left, says you're going to be all right in a few weeks."

"This," she added, "is the home of Miss Willie Hibbs. Miss Hibbs, my aunt, will be in shortly, to tell you how glad we are to have you in our home. We've sent to Dallas for a nurse, and some one wired Love Field of the accident. So, you see, you're not to worry about anything. I forgot," she finished, "to say that I am Nan Ridgeway—and that official-looking suit of pajamas you have on is one that I had just finished making for the Red Cross. It was meant for a wounded soldier—and I'd hardly finished sewing on the pocket when a wounded soldier dropped down to wear it! Are you quite comfortable?"

"Heavenly," he assured her. "If only I could be certain I'm not dreaming. Would you mind pinching me, Miss—Nan?" He looked to see if remembrance dawned in her eyes.

She started ever so slightly and sat down suddenly. Obviously she was puzzled.

"Are you——" she began. "Do you——" Then she finished desperately, "I haven't ever seen you before, have I?"

"I scarcely think so," he smiled. "Not seen me, but—you are fond of

nut chocolates and Charlie Chaplin and fall mornings, aren't you? And you think Oscar Wilde isn't fit for anything but to read aloud, and you prefer swimming and walking to tennis and golf, and you're afraid of the dark and know how to shoot a pistol?" Before he had finished his glib recital of her personal preferences, gleaned from their two intimate casual chats, the girl's eyes were ashine, her laughter imminent.

"How perfectly wonderful!" she exclaimed. "How perfectly wonderful of you to fall into my back yard! Are we going to keep on like this always—or is the spell broken now that you know my name and we've seen each other? But," she broke off, frowning at his crisp yellow hair, "your hair isn't red at all. You said they called you 'Brick.'"

"They do," he grinned. "Brick—short for 'Brickridge.' Henry Brickridge—at your feet now, at your service when I get mended."

"Lieutenant!" She saluted smartly.

"You look just as I thought you would," he commented, "even to the dimple—God bless it!"

"Are you sure you're comfortable?" Nan asked again, a trifle flushed from the steady warmth of his gaze.

"Oh, let me look at you!" he begged. "I've been in the dark about you so long. And," he added, with a significant glance at the great stone that flashed on her finger as she "knitted two, purled two," manipulating a ball of gray yarn in the capacious pocket of her gingham dress, "I might as well commit you to memory while I have this opportunity."

Nan twisted her ring silently, an expression on her face he did not understand.

"Nan," he asked fearfully, "are you to be married—soon?"

"I don't know just when," she replied slowly. "Not soon, I fancy." He was sure now that a shadow lurked in her eyes.

"Are you happy, Nan?"

She did not answer immediately, and as her needles clicked swiftly, he feared that he had offended her. But presently she looked at him squarely.

"No," she declared flatly, "I'm not."

Then, as if surprised by her own frankness, she made instant preparation for flight.

"I don't know why I always tell you the naked truth," she apologized. "But you've never seemed the sort of person one cared to camouflage. So just forget that I said that, won't you? I'm going to run down and see about your supper now, and you really ought to have some rest."

Brickridge learned much, in the weeks that followed, of a brand of hospitality he had heard celebrated in song and story. It seemed that the entire population of Danvers, upon hearing that a wounded aviator was being cared for at the Hibbs home, immediately determined upon a course of lavishness that well might have inspired other reckless flyers to attempt a drop into a Danvers back yard. Housewives sent in jellies and hot breads and steaming broths, and practically every girl in town made a comfort pillow for him. Men dropped by to leave cigarettes or cigars, and the telephone rang frequently.

"You've no idea," Nan teased him, "how it increases my popularity, having a wounded hero in the house. You'll have to let us give you a reception when you do get up, so the whole town can see you. I know six girls who are getting their complexions peeled right now, in anticipation of your first appearance in public!"

Miss Willie Hibbs, his real hostess, proved to be a ponderous and rather imposing personage. Brickridge thoroughly understood why she was called in local club circles "The Dreadnaught" when he observed her go into action the second day after the accident, upon the

arrival of his captain, who flew up to see about removing the crippled aviator to the camp hospital. Miss Hibbs would not consider the matter for a moment. Lieutenant Brickridge had come to grief in her back yard and among her own clotheslines, and she certainly felt that she should be accorded the privilege of seeing him fully recovered before he left the shelter of her roof. Brickridge would have the best of care and attention—and couldn't Captain Cliff stop for supper and spend the night before returning to camp?

It was Miss Hibbs, perhaps after watching the significantly cheerful sick-room atmosphere that prevailed when Nan was at Brickridge's bedside, who took it upon herself to gossip with the lieutenant about her niece's engagement to John Worth, the town's youngest, and most successful, hardware merchant. Miss Hibbs did not say so, but Brickridge inferred that this match was almost entirely the result of her kindly strategies. Obviously she derived much satisfaction from her oft-repeated assertion that, with Worth, Nan's future was assured.

"Then Mr. Worth will not go to war?" Brickridge asked wickedly. "He isn't in the draft?"

"No," Miss Hibbs answered complacently. "He's just beyond the age—thirty-two. And of course, if the draft should include him later, he can always prove dependency. There's his mother. She's old. And he's absolutely necessary to the farmers around here, demonstrating threshers and binders, you know, and showing them how to use the machinery he sells them. I told Nan, when she had a foolish notion about wanting him to enter a training camp when Bob did, that John Worth was entirely too useful a citizen to be spared. He's chairman of the Red Cross in Danvers. No, Nan can be thoroughly assured that war isn't going to disrupt her family!"

Brickridge thought that there was adequate reason for the shadow that dwelt in Nan's eyes.

They had long hours of companionship now. It was almost immediately the accepted routine for Nan to allow Nurse Ray the entire afternoon for her own devices, assuming charge of the sick room herself. This large, pleasant chamber, with its satiny old mahogany and gay rag rug, colorful chintz and ivory appointments, Brickridge learned, was Nan's own room. It added, somehow, to the sweetness of everything.

Nan frankly devoted herself to seeing that the man was kept comfortable, satisfied, and entertained. In doing so, of course she crept still closer into the little niche that was her shrine in his heart. Whether she knew this or not he could not be sure, and her nearness and sweetness—and her ultimate remoteness—tortured him. Her voice no longer haunted him. It was her eyes, her wistful mouth, a curl at her neck, the dimple!

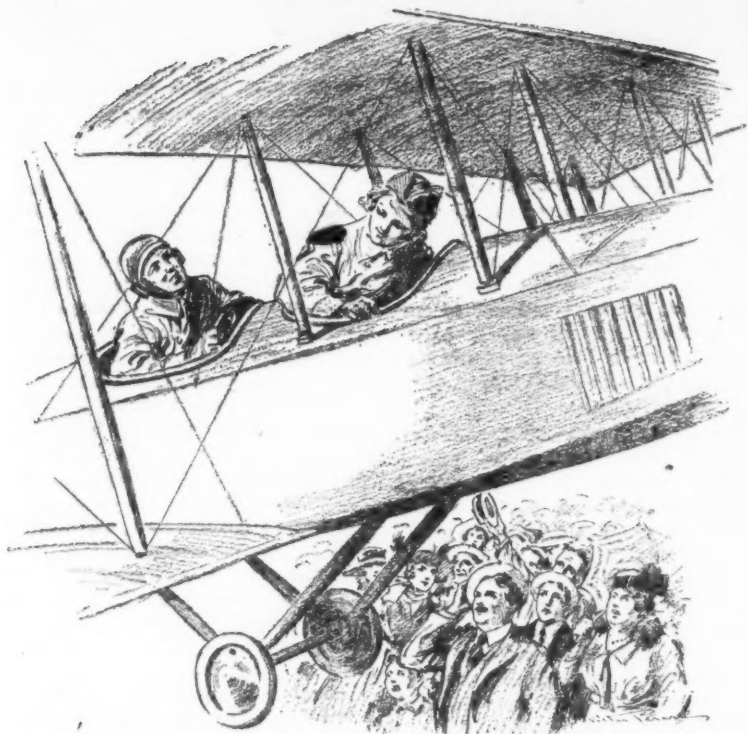
And how they talked to each other! They told each other all that had happened between their two fateful meetings, what had gone before, what had come after. The cousin who was ill in the Maine woods had not got meningitis, it seemed, only neuralgia.

"But Bob and the doctor insisted on moving her home right away," Nan explained plaintively. "I rather wanted to wait a day or so myself, to see whether she wouldn't get all right, since we'd come so far. But they were determined. And she was well before we got home!"

"I came back to the cottage," Brickridge told her.

"I thought you would." She dimpled.

They talked, too, of the war, of flyers and flying, subjects close to his heart. He found her wonderfully in accord with all his views.



"I heard you," she shouted. "I heard you, and I said, 'Yes!'"

"How does it feel, flying?" she demanded once.

"I don't know how to tell you," he offered shyly, "but I'd like you to let me show you when I get out of here. Would you be afraid to go up with a pilot who'd busted on a spinning nose dive?"

"Could I? Would you?" she cried. "Of course I'd be afraid—scared to death! But I'd love it!"

Brickridge laughed.

"You're not afraid of anything," he declared.

Her face was perfectly serious.

"I'm afraid of everything," she insisted. "I'm a perfect coward. I do things—because I know I'm afraid."

He thought again of her on the dark road where first he had heard her voice, calmly accepting it as her part to remain for an hour or more alone in an unprotected car at midnight; thought of her lonely watch by the side of the sick girl that night in the heart of the Maine woods; thought of her helping the doctor—as he had just learned of her doing—while his own head was bleeding from the cut that had laid open the scalp, even holding together the edges of the wound while the stitches were taken. Hers was a dauntless spirit!

"Sometimes," she was saying, "I'm afraid of everything—of life itself, I think."

Her eyes were somber now, and Brickridge dared to guess the nature of her thoughts.

"It isn't love—if you're afraid, Nan," he ventured.

She bent upon him a look of odd intensity.

"Perhaps you're right," she conceded.

But he was unprepared for what followed. When Nan took her place in the little low chair by his bed the following afternoon, there were traces of tears about her eyes and her manner was subdued, but her slender fingers were unadorned. No proud diamond of flawless hue blinked at him from the gray lengths of yarn.

"Nan?" he questioned breathlessly.

"Yes." She nodded shyly. "I was afraid to go on with it. Oh, I tried hard to convince myself that his motives were the finest—but the fact remained that he's perfectly free to go over there and fight, and he doesn't want to. I don't love him well enough to take the risk. I've got to have something splendid to tell my grandchildren about their grandfather's part in this war. If he'd enlisted—I'd have married him to-morrow."

"And been a war bride?" Brickridge teased.

"A title," she cried, "that I'd wear with pride, like a decoration!"

With an effort, Brickridge kept his voice quite steady.

"Had you thought," he suggested, "that there might be some one else who would be proud to confer the title upon you—since you regard it that way?"

In the silence that followed, the sound of Nan's needles was positively noisy.

"It's all very well," she said at length, a little brokenly, "for you to laugh about it. But it's tragedy when the bloom is dusted off a girl's first romance. John is the only sweetheart I ever had."

"Nan," he implored irrelevantly, "did you never even dream of me?"

She did not answer him then, and he was glad that there was yet another week before the doctor would allow him to return to camp. Time still to pursue that line of investigation!

In the meantime, he took steps in regard to her proposed flight. It was necessary, of course, for him to obtain permission to take up a passenger, and he exchanged letters with his commanding officer. His damaged plane had been shipped back to Love Field, and he would follow it by train, but it became a certainty that Nan would go up with him for a trial flight whenever he was able to return for her.

The last night of his stay in the home of the hospitable Miss Hibbs was rather an ordeal for the young aviator. He was on his feet now, and therefore able to receive social favors. There was a reception, and he shook hands with countless people whom he would never remember. And he smiled at countless girls. Never was a young man so popular—or so ungrateful. He was to leave on an early train the following morning, and despair settled upon him as he realized that he was not going to be able to see Nan alone again. After all their hours of pleasant intimacy, he was going to have to tell her good-by in a crowd.

Slender and wistfully lovely in a party gown of shadowy gray, she stood on the stairway and smiled down at him across the heads of most of her fellow townspeople. And there was a promise in that smile.

The promise developed in the morning. Nan was up with the sun to give him his breakfast.

"I persuaded Aunt Willie her head was too bad," she explained, "and promised to give you your breakfast and see you off."

Brickridge made a decision suddenly and plunged on it.

"Be ready at three, can you?" he surprised her by saying. "I'll fly back this afternoon and take you for that ride. Game?"

She nodded breathlessly, and Brickridge came around the table determinedly.

"I love you, Nan," he told her, and dared to kiss her lips.

Like a whirlwind, her arms were about his neck.

"I love you, too, Brick," she whispered. "But how did you know?"

Somehow the news of her promised adventure leaked out. There was a large crowd in Seth Carrol's field to watch Nan Ridgeway go up with the young flyer—the one that nearly broke his own neck on a fool somersault. On the whole, it was a most disapproving crowd. Nan Ridgeway had been the town tomboy, and tales of her daring from childhood through pinafore days still persisted, but this capped the climax. Miss Hibbs was there, also disapproving.

But Nan was radiant. She danced with impatience as Brickridge's machine skimmed bumpily over the uneven ground and finally came to a stop, the propeller still whirring.

Brickridge assisted her into the passenger seat ahead of the pilot's. Then he leaned against the body of the plane and looked at her hungrily.

"Oh, but you're the darlin'!" he assured her. "Afraid?"

"Horribly," she laughed.

He could see that she was nervous. "Steady, girl," he warned her. "This isn't going to be any worse than taking the elevator in the Woolworth Building."

"Let's go to the moon," she pro-

posed calmly. "I'd love to—with you, Brick."

Then, with the most important citizens of Danvers looking on, Brickridge made his proposal.

"Listen, Nan," he said after he had climbed to his seat, "listen now, because, after we start, you can't hear a thing. If I fly you clear to Dallas, will you marry me this afternoon? I've got another day's leave, and a license in my pocket."

Nan was looking at the little crowd, in whose combined gaze she saw avid curiosity.

"I'd be afraid not to," she said. "Danvers is a conservative community, and my reputation is gone right now. The only way I can justify my wild conduct is by marrying the critter who compromises me by taking me up to the clouds in broad, open daylight!"

"What did you say, dear?" He leaned forward, missing what she had said in the whirl of the motor. "Didn't you hear what I said? I said if I flew with you to Dallas——"

Nan twisted herself around to face him, laughing. And so it was that most of Danvers heard her reply and understood its meaning.

"I heard you," she shouted. "I heard you, and I said, 'Yes!'"

As the machine soared away, Miss Willie Hibbs received the excited questionings of her neighbors with accustomed equanimity.

"It was a case of love at first sight," she explained with resigned tolerance. "I knew what was going on right along. He loved Nan the moment he set eyes on her."

And that's the way it's told in Danvers still.



His Hour of Freedom

By DuVernet Rabell

Author of "When Satan Was Sick," "Don't Do It," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY CLARENCE ROWE

He married "a dead-game sport of a butterfly," and then longed for the Great Romance. How he found it makes this clever story.

PAUL HANSON was the last man in the world to be suspected of watching and waiting for the Great Romance. He was a tall, slim young chap, with keen gray eyes, a rather cynical mouth, and quiet manners. The men all liked him, but he couldn't talk personalities well enough to get him anywhere with the women. He liked to read, and over his books he dreamed; and sometimes he would look up from the pages and, through the smoke of his pipe, try to visualize the One Woman. He never could, not being very good at mental pictures. All he knew was that she would be everything to him—his ideal, his inspiration—and that he would give her the world to make her happy.

But he did not watch and wait until she arrived.

He married the daughter of James Morgan Wetheral—the Wetheral—a young thing who had been born under a golden star and who already had the earth and moon and many of the little stars to play with. He didn't marry her because he loved her. He married her because she loved him, and he knew that if he didn't marry her, he would break her heart. And Hanson was not the man to do this, in the first place, and, in the second place, Morgan had been his friend from the days when he had come friendless to a strange city—in fact, Bonnie Wetheral's father had given him his start in the business

world. So really there was only one thing for Hanson to do, and he did it like a man and a gentleman, resolutely putting out of his heart and mind forever the dream of the Great Romance.

At least, he tried to put it out of his mind; but occasionally the thought of what might have been would creep in, and he would wonder just what life would have held for him if the door to real happiness had not been closed to him.

Not that he and Bonnie made a failure of their married life—oh, nothing like that. They got along a great deal better than most young people of totally different tastes and opinions do in this modern world of ours. But, secretly, Hanson was a bit contemptuous of the way Bonnie spent her time and the people she spent it with. Bonnie, to him, was just a beautifully colored, iridescent butterfly, who loved to play in the sunshine of life's garden. The art of enjoying herself every minute of the day was the only one she worked at. She danced, she went to the opera, the newest plays, an occasional art exhibit, if the musician was very famous or the artist creating any sort of a furore in her small world. Always she was very gay and apparently bubbling over with the joy of life. A close observer might have thought that she rode a bit high on the gale of her own laughter, but so few of Bonnie's intimates were close observers.

Once in a while, she would try to coax Hanson to play with her. But she was never noticeably successful. Occasionally, too, she attempted to take an interest in his business affairs. To this end, she had her piano moved into the library just off Hanson's bedroom, and while he pored distractedly over his papers, she played bits of popular songs, Indian love lyrics, impious French music-hall ditties, and sometimes, when it rained or the wind sighed about the house, lullabies. She sang rather well, too—a sweet, clear soprano, with unexpected little plaintive notes in it, that gave you a shiver of pleasure and pain all at once. Then, when Hanson tried to read, she perched on the arm of his chair and, ruffling his hair with her restless fingers, demanded that he tell her the story. As few of the books that Hanson read were story-books, this soon bored her, and she would slip to the floor and play "idiot's delight" to a continual accompaniment of light chatter. Bonnie's conversation was amusing enough, but Hanson felt sometimes that it was like trying to make a satisfying meal of *hors d'œuvres*.

Of course Bonnie was happy. But it did look sometimes as if she tried to be happier, to get closer to Hanson. If she did not succeed, she did not, however, flag her defeats with tears, sulks, or temper. If she was a butterfly, she was a dead-game sport of a butterfly, and amiable, as it is surely up to a butterfly to be.

As for Hanson, living this sort of life and feeling the way he did, it was natural that his business should absorb more and more of his time. Oftener and oftener, as Bonnie went about without him, she shrugged her white shoulders and referred gayly to "my so-busy husband!"

One spring, after he had been married nearly three years, Hanson's affairs took a decided upward turn. He

began to do business with an influential Western firm, and by June was on the verge of a deal that meant a fortune to him. He and his secretary spent hours at his office, working, figuring, planning each minute detail, and in time the strain began to tell on Hanson, and his health to suffer. If it hadn't been for this secretary of his, a girl by the name of Gertrude Miller, he could never have undertaken this nerve-racking grind of preparation.

This Gertrude Miller was a girl who had worked herself up from a minor position in the office by sheer efficiency, until now she was indispensable to Hanson. She was a tall, willowy young thing, with a low, unobtrusive voice, beautiful hands that could accomplish wonders in spite of their beauty, and a knack of wearing a one-piece serge dress exceedingly well. As she took more and more responsibility from Hanson's shoulders, she grew more and more deeply into his confidence. Hanson was a man who gave small thought to appearances, and under the present pressure, while steering this new deal, he took to lunching with his secretary, and occasionally, when they worked late, taking her out to dinner.

At first their talk was purely of the business affairs that they were both interested in; but gradually—so gradually that Hanson had not the faintest idea just when their tone changed—he and Gertrude Miller began to talk on less mundane subjects. He came to know more of the girl herself. For instance, he learned that she was married, and that she was supporting an invalid husband; and although she did not say so, Hanson inferred from what she did not say that her marriage had not been happy. He wondered at this. How could any man fail to appreciate a girl like this? But—he shrugged—hers was the type on whom the burdens of family and friends were very apt to be thrown.

But she accepted these burdens cheerfully, and was always ready to do things for people. For example, one day she told Hanson, as an excuse for her preoccupation, that she was worried about the brother of an old school

friend. He was not strong enough for a confining position and, being out of work, was growing alarmingly despondent. Fortunately Hanson was able to help her here. The Hansons needed a house man, and Miss Miller was more than grateful when Hanson suggested her protégé for this position. When he went home that evening, Hanson felt quite a little glow of self-appreciation, which, however, was speedily dissipated by Bonnie.

"My dear Paul," she protested, "Miss Miller may run your office, but surely *I* may be permitted to run your home!"

"But, Bonnie," Hanson replied, noting the unusual note in her voice, "why take that attitude? This man Stevens is experienced. He's——"

"He's doubtless all Miss Efficiency claims for him," Bonnie shrugged. "That's not exactly my point."

Hanson frowned swiftly.

"Miss Efficiency?"

Bonnie lifted her chin with a defiant laugh.

"Well, she is efficient, isn't she?"

"She certainly is. Miss Miller is a wonderful girl. Not only is she thoroughly capable, but her character——"

"And you pride yourself on being a judge of character, don't you, Paul?" And while there was still a note of laughter running through his wife's tone, her eyes were unwontedly grave.

The time arrived for Bonnie to open the house in Bar Harbor. The week before,



Then, when Hanson tried to read, she perched on the arm of his chair and, ruffling his hair, demanded that he tell her the story.

some intimate friends on Long Island invited her out for the polo games. They were friends of old standing and they liked Hanson, and the night before Bonnie left, she came into his library and asked him if he wouldn't reconsider his regrets and go with her.

"You need to frivol for a while," she said, smiling down at him. "There's a tight line around your mouth and olive shadows under your eyes. Why, if you don't stop working so hard, you'll cease to be my handsome husband—you'll be just a money grub, like the rest of the American men."

Hanson pushed back the hair from his aching forehead and tried to rescue a pile of important papers that Bonnie was sitting on.

"It takes the grubs to make money, so that the pretty butterflies like you can flit about in the sunshine," he answered.

"Oh, money!" Bonnie retorted, with the carelessness of one who has never known the lack of it.

Hanson smiled.

"You needn't use that scornful tone. Money is as necessary to your existence as sunshine to the flowers."

Bonnie flashed her magnificent rings back and forth under the light from the green student lamp.

"I am an extravagant piece, I know," she admitted. Then she raised her arms and puffed out her bright hair. "But why worry?" She laughed lightly. "Dad has more money than he knows what to do with. Really, Paul, you know, all you have to do in this world is to amuse me—and let daddy take care of the rest."

Hanson drew his brows together.

"A man doesn't feel that way."

"Once you didn't mind so much."

Bonnie looked at him suddenly. "It's only in the last years that you've buried yourself entirely in your business."

"As a man gets older, he becomes more ambitious to amount to something,

I suppose. I don't want to live and die merely as the son-in-law of Morgan Wetheral," he finished in a lighter tone.

Bonnie pressed one finger to her lips.

"No," she agreed absently after a moment, "I dare say not. But—you do need a rest, Paul. Everybody says you look badly. Do come with me. We'll have a gorgeous time." She smiled persuasively. "We'll dance, ride horseback, motor, swim—and Madge says her cousin plays a wonderful game of bridge—"

"Did you say rest?" Hanson inquired dryly.

Bonnie laughed.

"Well, such frivolity would certainly be a change for you—and change is often rest, they say. Oh, do come, Paul! I'm so tired of being a grass widow."

Hanson shook his head and glanced significantly at his papers.

"Not this time."

"But why not, Paul?" she was persisting, when Hanson, his nerves quivering from overwork and strain, interrupted her:

"Now, Bonnie, it's no use arguing. I won't go. If I went anywhere, I'd run up to Maine for some fishing. That party of yours would bore me to death. I'm in no mood for it!"

"But you look so tired. I think——"

"No, you don't—you never think. You just rush about from one mad thing to another, and if it amuses you, it's all you ask. All your crowd are like that."

Bonnie slid off the table.

"Dear me, what a feather-brained lot you must think us! Ah, well," she went on, her lips twisting into a half smile, "this world is a place of balance, they tell me. There must be some mental lightweights to balance the brains like—like yours."

Hanson shrugged.

"I didn't mean to be nasty," he offered after a moment.

Bonnie turned in the doorway. "Maybe you couldn't help it. Some people can't—sometimes," and her light laughter rang out as she ran down the hall.

The next morning she left, calling Hanson up at his office and wishing him good-by by telephone.

Hanson was getting perilously near the verge of a nervous breakdown. The day after Bonnie left, he was hardly able to get up in the morning, but spurred by the thought of the work that awaited him at the office, he

finally managed to drag himself out of bed. After an icy shower and a drive through the park in his open car, he felt better. But before noon, his head was rocking again, his hands were unsteady and like ice, and red circles danced before his eyes.

Miss Miller put down her pencil and looked at him compassionately.

"Really, Mr. Hanson," she said, "you're not able to do this. You ought to go home."

"How can I," Hanson demanded irritably, "with all these letters to get out?"

"Why don't you go home now?" Miss Miller suggested. "I could come up this afternoon, and you could give me these letters then, if you felt better."

Hanson rested his throbbing head against his hand.

"I think I will," he agreed wearily. "If I could get home, perhaps my head might let up. It's so hot down here."

"I'm feeling better already," he announced a few minutes later, as he stood in the doorway, ready to leave.

"You look better," Miss Miller smiled.

"I hate to leave those letters until this afternoon. They ought to be mailed before noon." He glanced at his desk and frowned uncertainly.



Hanson rested his throbbing head against his hand. Miss Miller put down her pencil and looked at him compassionately. "Really, Mr. Hanson," she said, "you're not able to do this. You ought to go home."

Clarence Rowe

"Perhaps, if I came up with you now," Miss Miller suggested after a moment's hesitation, "you could give them to me and get them off your mind."

"That's a great idea. And we'll take a run up the river to cool off before we get to work."

They drove for about an hour, and Hanson felt greatly refreshed when they drew up before the house. Stevens, the new man, admitted them, and, unnoticed by Hanson, a quick glance passed between him and Miss Miller, before she followed Hanson up the stairs.

All the way out to Long Island, Bonnie moved restlessly from one side of the car to the other. She wanted the windows down, and then, because of the dust, ordered them closed again. She asked the chauffeur twice if her husband's car was in good running order for a long trip. She added that he planned to go to Maine any day. There was a distraught frown on her face when the car drew up at the house, and her hostess came fluttering out onto the porch, followed by a laughing group of welcoming people.

That afternoon at bridge, Bonnie's mind appeared to be anywhere but on her cards. Later, she shivered in the sea and said she didn't care much for surf bathing. And that night, while dancing, she told her partner, a youth who prided himself on his skill at dancing, that he really didn't fox-trot as well as Paul.

"Poor Paul!" she sighed. "I wonder if it's hot in town."

Later, she leaned from her window and watched the little waves ripple along the beach with white, caressing fingers. The moon was rising out of the sea, a great disk of orange, flame-colored and hot looking. Bonnie hummed a mournful little air under her breath. Then, after staring unwink-

ingly at the moon for some time, she turned to her maid.

"Norah," she said, "you needn't unpack any more of my things. I'm going back to town the first thing in the morning. I'm worried about Mr. Hanson. He isn't well."

Wisely avoiding an interview, bound to be trying, with her hostess, Bonnie left a note of explanation for her, and by noon was back in the city. She told her maid that she meant to go home, change her clothes, and then drive down to the office in her own roadster for her husband. She added, with a hopeful little note in her voice, that perhaps they might go out of town somewhere for over Sunday.

She was in her bedroom, slipping into a frock of cool pongee, when she heard voices in the library adjoining. She started forward eagerly when she heard Hanson's voice, and then checked herself as his secretary replied. She sighed disappointedly. More business! It must be something pressing, since Paul had brought Miss Miller home with him. A sudden thought made her frown. She stood there thoughtfully, her finger pressed against her lips, as if engrossed in her own thoughts.

Paul had come into the library and walked dazedly across the room toward the open window. Halfway there, he stopped and caught dizzily at a chair.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he said. "I never felt like this before in my life. Why, I can hardly see!"

Miss Miller glanced at him instantly and stepped to the house phone.

"Stevens," she said, "send some one up immediately! Understand?"

She turned back to Hanson.

"You must lie down, Mr. Hanson. Here—let me help you to the couch."

Half leading him, half supporting him, she helped him across the room.

They had reached the couch when there was the sound of running feet

outside, and a moment later, a man, accompanied by Stevens, burst into the room. He stopped just inside the door and stood regarding Hanson with an evil leer upon his face.

Hanson clutched at Miss Miller's shoulder as he felt himself swaying, and then, in astonishment, jerked himself erect.

"So there you are!" the man in the doorway sneered.

Miss Miller looked at him.

"Joe!" she exclaimed in a low tone.

"Surprised, are you?"

Hanson turned to Miss Miller.

"Who is that man?"

"My husband—Joe Cary."

The man advanced into the room.

"I thought I'd catch you one of these days," he said, in an ugly tone, to Hanson.

Hanson stared at him coldly.

"I don't understand what you mean."

"Oh, yes, you do," Cary retorted.

"And—do you happen to know what alienation means?"

Miss Miller glanced at her husband, and then quietly crossed the room and seated herself beside the desk.

"Alienation?" Hanson repeated. He tossed his head, trying to clear it.

"That's what I said. Alienation of my wife's affection."

Hanson laughed shortly.

"You're talking rot!" He turned slowly and regarded Miss Miller with speculative curiosity.

"That's for a court to decide," Cary declared, "and I've got a good case," he added with a significant glance at the man Stevens. "But if that's your attitude, it's no use our waiting."

"Just a moment," Hanson said. "What did you expect my attitude would be?"

"Why—you're a smart man—I expected you to be reasonable. This won't look nice in the papers, you know. It'll be bad for your business—to say nothing of your wife!"

"Leave her out of this, please!" Hanson ordered sharply. Then his brain began to work, half mechanically at first, as if some one had turned on a switch somewhere and set the wheels in motion.

He dismissed immediately Cary's suggestion that his business standing could be vitally injured by a scandal of this sort. Many a man he knew had gone through worse, and his business had not been damaged; men looked on these things tolerantly. But his domestic life? He knew Bonnie. Bonnie would never submit to a public humiliation like this. It would mean divorce. And what if it did mean divorce? Wouldn't divorce mean his freedom?

Freedom—something he had always craved in his heart! Freedom to live his life in his own way! He took a deep breath. His hour of freedom had struck!

Then, half unconsciously, his eyes wandered about the room—and came to a stop by the window. Bonnie's piano stood there, just under the gold-shaded lamp—the piano she would insist on playing when he was trying to work. He saw her fair head, heard her singing the gay little French songs she was so fond of, with the laughter running all through them.

And at that moment, suddenly, like lightning striking from a clear sky, Hanson knew that he loved Bonnie, that he had always loved her—that she was, had always been, the Great Romance he had cherished in his heart. And now, when she was threatened, the thought of losing her made his very soul shake with terror. His hour of freedom! He laughed scornfully. Freedom for what? For a life of husks and Dead Sea apples without her!

Fear made him cautious. He looked over at the man who stood near the desk, watching him.

"Well?" he asked slowly.

Cary folded his soft hat in his hands

and teetered back and forth on his heels.

"It's up to you," he said coolly. "We've got you—and you know it. Just how much is it worth to you to keep this quiet?"

Hanson's anger flared.

"If I had only myself to consider, it wouldn't be worth a damn! There's not a word of truth in your claim, and I'd fight you to a finish in and out of

gladly, every cent he had worked so hard for.

"All right!" he snapped. He looked at Miss Miller. "You may draw the check."



"So there you are!" the man in the doorway sneered.

every court until you were where you belong! But——"

"Yes, it's always the 'buts' that count in the end," Cary laughed. He glanced keenly at Hanson. "The price is ten thousand dollars."

Hanson almost breathed a sigh of relief. What was ten thousand dollars to protect Bonnie? He would give, and

She opened her bag.

"I have it here," she said, meeting his eyes defiantly.

"So you are in on this, too," Hanson observed, as he seated himself at the desk and took the pen she handed him.

Just as he bent over the desk, the door behind him opened.

For a moment Bonnie stood on the threshold quietly taking in the scene before her. Then she laughed.

"You needn't sign that check, Paul," she said.

Paul whirled around in his chair. Then he rose and faced the three who stood before his desk. His eyes were black and his voice was ugly.

"This knocks the bottom out of your market. Now—it's my turn—and by—"

Bonnie raised her hand.

"No, Paul—listen to me."

She ran to his side and for a few moments talked to him earnestly in a low tone. Presently Paul nodded, although he still scowled blackly.

"You may go," he said. "But remember, in case you may have afterthoughts, that the penalty for blackmail is twenty years."

When he turned around, Bonnie was standing by the window drawing her white gloves through her hands and thoughtfully looking out onto the terrace.

Hanson walked across the room and stood beside her. He wanted to say something, explain it all to her, tell her how much she really meant to him, but somehow his throat seemed choked with sand, and he couldn't say a word.

"Paul," Bonnie asked slowly, "why were you going to sign that check?"

"I had to."

"Why? Were you afraid?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

"Of what?" He laughed suddenly, his voice unsteady. "Bonnie, I've been in some pretty tight places in my life, but I've never been afraid until today. When I stood there and faced the fact of losing you—God, it seemed as if fear had hold of my throat—was

shaking the very life out of me! Losing you—losing you—when you mean— Bonnie, Bonnie," he cried desperately, "how can I make you see how it was with me?"

Bonnie raised her eyes. For an instant Hanson stood silent, hardly daring to believe what he saw mirrored there. Then he drew a quick breath and caught her in his arms.

"I've been a fool!" he declared hoarsely. "But—if you'll give me another chance, Bonnie, I swear to you that things will be different."

"Well, this looks as if I might," Bonnie laughed, but there were tears as well as laughter in her voice.

After long, silent moments that taught Hanson his flower of romance was all that he dreamed and more, he began to wonder. Men don't usually wonder when an angel opens the gates of paradise and lets them peep inside. They take their happiness as they find it and thank their God—but Hanson had so much to puzzle him. How had he gone all these years loving Bonnie, and yet not knowing it was love? And did Bonnie know of his sudden awakening? No, of course not, dear little trusting thing! A woman never knew what went on in the heart of a man.

Then Bonnie looked up at him.

"You never knew, did you, Paul, how much you—you cared?" she whispered.

"No," Hanson answered, his voice still choked. "You see, dear, men don't realize—"

"I know they don't realize—so many things. I've known that for a long time. That's what gave me the courage to wait."

Hanson smiled down at her.

"Well, sometimes God is merciful, and a man learns—before he's lost all that makes life worth living."



SWEET PEAS *by* Eliza Kent

Author of "Foghorn and Flute," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY O. CARTER

In which a cautious and ambitious young man takes a little flyer in love, with results not altogether happy for himself.

GLENWOOD was a bank clerk. This must be stated first, because Glenwood considered it the most important thing about himself. Now, some people thought, because Glenwood got but eighty-five per month and couldn't support an automobile and a valet, that he should be charmed to ride upon the L and eager to press his own trousers—in fact, they thought he should be as devoid of ambition as a clothopper. Such was shockingly far from the truth, for Glenwood was bursting with ambition, especially matrimonial ambition. He considered it a man's sacred duty to give as much thought to the matter of selecting a life partner as he would to selecting a new tailor—and that was a very important matter indeed with Glenwood.

Away up in the attic bedroom of Mrs. Stroud's boarding house dwelt Maggie. Now the location of Maggie's room never seriously disturbed Glenwood, but he did contemplate with pain the fact that she worked in an overall factory, for she was the only factory person in the boarding house, and such

things naturally lower the prestige of a place. Glenwood felt obliged to criticize Maggie for being a factory hand. Granting that she was forced by stern necessity to work, could she not have found a more elevating place to toil than a factory? It was conclusive evidence to Glenwood that Maggie lacked ambition, but in spite of this, his heart turned to Maggie as the sunflower turns to the orb of day.

Away up on Drexdon Boulevard, in a brownstone mansion, dwelt Miss DeMott, daughter of the vice president of The Bank. She was quite taken with Glenwood. He acknowledged this to himself impersonally, dispassionately, without egotism, as one acknowledges a business asset. Miss DeMott had none of Maggie's charm—in fact, she was homely. Miss DeMott can be adequately described in that one word—"homely." But to say that Maggie was beautiful was not to describe her; to say that her eyes were blue and her skin white and her hair brown and glossy as a butterfly's wing would not describe her, for so are the eyes and skin and

hair of a million other girls. But Glenwood believed that if Maggie were placed in the midst of the million other girls, she would stand out separate and distinct and be as one apart. And so she would.

But beauty and charm are not the only things to be considered, you know, when you are choosing a life partner. If he married Miss DeMott, the only child of a rich man, he would be accepted with wide-open arms by high society. If he married Maggie, he would remain a bank clerk and, in addition, it would mean trying to make two live on what he found it impossible for one to live on. No sane man should think twice on the matter. Thus reasoned Glenwood, while he footed up columns at The Bank. But bring forth the evening, place Maggie opposite him at the supper table, and his reasoning powers were shaken to their very foundations.

Then came a day when Fate took a hand and forced the issue. On his way home from work, Glenwood found a spray of sweet peas. He put them, quite tenderly, in his buttonhole, for once upon a time a wonderful reader of the stars had told him that sweet peas were his lucky flower and that to find them on his path meant sudden riches. So, on this day when he had found his lucky flower, Mrs. Stroud told him, confidentially, that Maggie had received a letter on the afternoon's mail with a lawyer's name in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope, and that Maggie was one of the heirs of the late Mr. Fitch Bennet, who had left a fortune of a million or more. She further confided that when Maggie was a child, she had once given the old man a bunch of flowers, which was the reason he had remembered her in his will.

"Were they sweet peas?" Glenwood asked eagerly.

Mrs. Stroud thought they were.

"May I glimpse at the envelope?" Glenwood inquired, also in confidence.

He stood at the bottom of the attic stairs while Mrs. Stroud produced the letter, and only the most skillful eyes could ever have detected that the poor little envelope had been opened by the persuasive steam of Mrs. Stroud's teakettle. But Glenwood saw it, and that, with the name, "Anthony Beam, Attorney at Law," in the upper left-hand corner, convinced him that Mrs. Stroud knew whereof she spoke.

At supper Maggie said never a word about the letter, but Glenwood could see that her lovely eyes were burning with excitement. He observed, too, that others must have received the news, for every one was extravagantly polite to Maggie—with the exception of Robert Selby, a grocery-store bookkeeper. Now, this was really remarkable, as Selby usually made a fool of himself over Maggie; in fact, at times he quite disgusted Glenwood. But tonight he sat as lifeless as a tin man, so probably he had heard the news, too.

Glenwood kept as close to Maggie as a thorn to a rose and after supper bought her a box of expensive chocolates and took her to a twenty-five-cent movie. Before he left her that night, they were engaged. It was a little detail that had to be attended to before the fortune was announced, and he had to confess to himself that he felt wonderfully relieved, too, because he had secretly feared she might prefer Robert Selby.

The next evening Maggie gave a little dinner at the Boston, with covers for ten. It was quite an artistic affair, with a splendid menu, a centerpiece of sweet peas, and a spray of the same flower at each plate. And still Maggie said nothing of Old Man Bennet's money. But the dinner itself was proof that she had acquired sudden wealth, for every one knew that Maggie spent money for only the necessities of life.



"A wedding!" the stranger whispered. "Who is the bride?" Glenwood's vocal organs weren't working very well, but he managed to murmur huskily the bride's name.

O'CARTER

When Glenwood came downstairs the following morning, a pale-cheeked, red-eyed Maggie beckoned him into the sitting room.

"I'm in a peck of trouble," she sobbed. "A few days ago, I received a letter from a lawyer, and he told me I was one of the heirs of Mr. Fitch Bennet, so I went to the lawyer's office yesterday morning and a young lady gave me an envelope with my name on it. When I got home and opened the letter there was a check made out to me for twenty-five dollars. I was so disappointed I cried! It just seemed work and sleep, work and sleep, all the time, with never a cent to spend on myself, and I thought, as I didn't owe it to anybody, surely it wouldn't hurt for me to spend the twenty-five right quick on having a good time for once. So I gave the dinner on it last night. It cost me twenty-five dollars—fifteen for the menu, five for the Blue Room, and five for the flowers. And when I got up to my room last night, I found this letter, which had fallen behind the pin-cushion." And she handed the ill-fated thing to Glenwood. He read:

DEAR MADAM: We find that, through a clerical error in our office, a mistake in names was made, and you were given a twenty-five dollar check. Please call at our office at once in regard to the matter. Yours truly,

ANTHONY BEAM.

"I haven't the twenty-five," Maggie continued, "and it would take me four or five months to save it! Oh, I don't know what I shall do!"

Glenwood didn't know, either. It was a terribly trying situation. He fain would have comforted her, yet he felt that wisdom demanded a sterner course.

"Maggie," he said, desperately, "I haven't the twenty-five either. If I had, I should be glad to give it to you. But I'm two months behind now. I proposed to you the other night. I won't deny that I love you, but we are too poor to marry. So I'm going to

ask you to release me, for I shouldn't ask a poor girl to marry me when I haven't anything myself. It would be selfish!"

Now, Glenwood considered this an honorable statement; indeed, he felt that not many men in his position would have had the moral stamina to make so honorable a statement. But Selby, who had stumbled into the room and overheard, seemed to think otherwise. Five minutes he spent trampling out the vintage of his grapes of wrath by shaking Glenwood until his teeth chattered. Then he turned to Maggie.

"I'll loan you the twenty-five," he said, "and you can pay it back or keep it till Gabriel blows his trumpet, whichever you want to. I get a hundred a month and don't spill it renting swallow-tailed coats and running around with rich girls as wouldn't wipe their feet on me. This corn-colored cur, here, heard you were an heiress, and he immediately proposed, and when he finds you're not, he immediately throws you over. Maggie, I want you to marry me! I want you to marry me this very day!"

Selby, being an ordinary bookkeeper in an ordinary grocery store, ought to have been slight of build and of a milky complexion. Unfortunately, however, he was neither. Indeed, he looked like a young gladiator, arrayed for the battle, as he shook his clenched fist under Glenwood's ambitious nose. And think not that Glenwood was a coward. Indeed no. He clenched his fists, too, but suddenly remembering that he had on his best suit, as his everyday brown was to journey forth to the cleaner's that very morning, he replaced his hat, straightened his collar, turned his back, and wended his gentlemanly way to The Bank.

Now, Glenwood did not often go home to lunch. It consumed time and money, and he could get a decent lunch of pie and coffee for fifteen cents down-

town and have half an hour for window shopping. But curiosity is a doer of great things—it is said to have once killed a cat—and to-day it took Glenwood back to the boarding house for lunch, for he must see what had become of Maggie and Selby.

As he neared the house, a distinguished-looking stranger descended from a limousine and went up the steps ahead of him. Side by side they peeped into the half-open door of the boarding-house parlor. Under an immense red Christmas bell stood Selby and Maggie, and a white veil, held in place by a wreath of sweet peas, fell about Maggie's shoulders.

"A wedding!" the stranger whispered. "Who is the bride?"

Glenwood's vocal organs were not

working very well, but he managed to murmur huskily the bride's name.

"Aha!" came the answer. "I'm her lawyer. Our cashier got her name mixed with old Fitch Bennet's mother-in-law and gave her the old lady's check. I've come to see her about it. Bennet cut his mother-in-law off with twenty-five dollars, you know. He left Miss Maggie fifty thousand. You see, she once gave the old man a bunch of sweet peas——"

Ten minutes later, as Glenwood sat, crumpled up like a withered leaf, on the curb, something peppered down upon his crushed spirits. It was a handful of rice. A horn honked, a girlish laugh rang out, and a limousine glided away into the stream of life, bearing Maggie and the fifty thousand.



LOVERS AND FOOLS

OH, science and reason are ever changing,
And nothing is born of the two but dies.
And the only practical thing is dreaming,
And only lovers and fools are wise.

Only lovers and fools have wisdom,
And scholars and wise men—what are they?
So let us do only what fools would think of,
And let us say only what lovers say!

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES.

Ad Valorem

By John Barton Oxford

Author of "The Man Tamer," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. A. FURMAN

The value of poetry when a man is in love.

IF you had told Stanley Glynn he was a poet, he would have promptly put you down as a person of more than ordinary perception. A person of more than ordinary perception—when you bring the thing down to a final issue—is, more often than not, one whose ideas are pretty much the same as our own. To Stanley's mind, the bulk of the human family seemed utterly devoid of perception.

* Stanley felt very sure about the poet part of it himself, but he was not at all certain of the attitude of the rest of the world toward him as a disciple of the Muse. There were reasons. The postman left them frequently in long and more or less bulky manila envelopes, addressed to Stanley in the faint and wobbly heiroglyphics of his rented typewriter.

He was tall and lanky and so nearsighted that he seemed to be smelling out the words on whatever page he happened to be reading. The lean face with the hollowed cheeks he was wont to term "ascetic" when he was studying its reflection in the mirror. Well, which of us isn't as charitable to himself as possible? The vague air of melancholy that always enveloped him, like a cloak made for somebody else, he was firmly convinced came from a starved and timid soul. An unfeeling world put it down to dyspepsia.

Every week day, from eight until six, Stanley trailed his artistic ideals in the dust by dispensing collars and shirts,

gloves and ties, handkerchiefs and bundles of laundry, over the counters of one of the Jerome-Belden chain of haberdasheries, to a public that seemed in need of such things. This was well. If he hadn't done something of the sort, there would have been no sheltering roof of a three-dollar-a-week hall room for him, no rented typewriter, probably no Stanley Glynn.

Evenings he played labored, one-fingered tunes on the rented typewriter and made extra useless work for the post-office department.

Once, it is true, a freakish periodical, with a freakish name and a supposedly unique make-up, pounced upon a twenty-line piece of verse of his, cut out ten of the lines, printed the maimed result to fill in a page, and sent Stanley a dozen copies of the issue in payment.

Whereupon, Stanley had two or three weeks of blissful visions that interfered with his professional duties at the haberdashery and all but lost him his job. He even contemplated shell-rimmed spectacles and a windsor tie on the strength of those maltreated ten lines.

But the visions faded, as visions will. Neither the shell-rimmed spectacles nor the windsor tie materialized. They were a trifle too conspicuous for the Jerome-Belden stores and the patrons thereof. The periodical with the freakish name bumped bows on into financial disaster—which explains, perhaps, how even ten lines of Stanley's verse happened

to see the light of day. And, since there were no more freakish publications courting calamity at that moment, apparently, his fame, it appeared, for the nonce must rest on that one brief appearance in print.

own risk. Corry was short and compact and sudden in his every movement and freckled across the bridge of his turned-up nose and quick as a cat on his feet. Corry probably had never seen a poet in his life, but he could have been arrested for the ideas he had formed about them.

None the less, Corry Hogan was a poet—a sort of reversed poet, it is true, but a poet all the same. Where you would naturally expect a poet to be a poet with his head, Corry was a poet with his feet. They were



Evenings he played labored, one-fingered tunes on the rented typewriter, and made extra useless work for the post-office department.

Wherefore, art being long, Stanley sold ties and collars and shirts and handkerchiefs, and between times sent up a prodigious clatter on the rented typewriter in the second-flight-back hall room in the cabbage-scented realm presided over by a portly lady named Mrs. Brewer.

If you had told Corry Hogan he was a poet, you would have done so at your

very light feet, twinkling feet, untutored feet, but highly poetic feet. Corry had expressed his each and every emotion with them as soon as he could stand on them, almost. It was a habit that grew on him. It accounted for much of his quickness in turning, much of the noiseless lightness of his step.

In his third-flight-back hall room at

the eminently respectable lodging house conducted by one Mrs. Brewer, Corry might have been heard at all hours of the evening treading a measure that adequately expressed his mood of the moment. Therein lay the poetry of it. The measure did very thoroughly express the mood. If you could have watched him, as no one ever had the chance to do, you might have beheld those feet of his telling of the dreariness of the winter streets, or the first whispers of coming spring, or the rain that was pattering down, or the summer wind whispering through the rustling leaves of the dusty trees over in the park.

Corry danced for the sheer love of motion; because he had to dance; because there was something in him that had to be expressed, and those rhythmic feet were his only adequate medium of expression. He had never thought of an audience for his expression; the thought of one would have sent him headlong under the farthest corner of the folding bed, which deceived nobody in its dignified rôle of couch during the hours it was unoccupied. The joy of motion, the love of the thing itself and for its own sake, was enough for Corry Hogan. That there were golden shekels and fame in those feet of his never for a moment crossed his mind.

Corry, anyway, was contented with his lot. His was a simple, kindly soul, with few and simple needs. The wages in the molding room were very good; the work was not particularly hard, or Corry didn't consider it particularly hard; and any moment, when the confines of the hall room palled on him, he could stand the couch on end in one corner to get a little added room and be happy by the hour whirling and turning and twisting to the barest hint of a tune whistled softly between his tongue and teeth.

Corry did not know that the occupancy of the first-flight-front square

room had changed hands again until, one rainy November night as he came home from the foundry, he saw a girl opening the door of it. In the wan light of such gas as Mrs. Brewer saw fit to apportion to the first-flight jet, Corry thought her a most startlingly pretty girl. Perhaps he was hit all the harder because he had never before bothered much about girls, pretty or otherwise.

The girl had a tray in her hands. She had evidently come from the kitchen downstairs. Her hair was brown and loosely knotted low on her neck, and wisps of it waved about her pink ears. Corry liked the red of her cheeks—the right sort of red, it was—and the little tilt to her nose and the curve of her lips. She wore some sort of a loose bath wrapper, dull gray, with little white rabbits chasing one another all over it.

The girl was balancing the tray in one slender hand and fumbling for the knob of the door with the other.

"Yes, it's me—Pam," she was saying to some one on the other side of the door. "No, don't get up. I'll manage."

It was a voice that went with her, Corry thought, the right sort of voice for the right sort of girl. He took the rest of the stairs two at a time. His hat came off as he went. He was just behind her in the dark and narrow hall.

"If I can lend you a hand maybe, ma'am," he suggested, surprised at his own temerity.

But some one came down the flight above with long strides. Some one stepped in ahead of him. Some one took the tray from the girl's hand and turned the knob and swung open the door.

"There you are, Miss Mellor," said Stanley Glynn, returning the tray to the girl.

"Oh, thank you!" she said. "And thank you, too," she went on, turning to Corry.

Then she went into the room, turned, smiled at them both, and pushed the door shut with her heel.

Stanley Glynn, with a curt nod to Corry, went up the stairs again. Corry mounted to his own room. He threw off his hat and coat. He upended the couch in a corner. He began to dance. It was youth and spring and love he danced, although the November drizzle rattled against the streaked windowpanes. Never had Corry Hogan danced as he danced that night. A pair of brown eyes, two red cheeks, an uptilted nose, an adorable mouth, wavy brown hair, straying errantly from the loose knot low on the white neck, and a dull gray bath wrapper with white rabbits chasing one another all over it, gave him an inspiration he had never known before. And all that Corry Hogan thought of that vision he had seen beneath the cotton-stuffed gas jet at the top of the first flight he now put into his flying feet.

In the middle of the creation, he stopped. He bounded down the stairs to the lower hall, to the basement below that. He bellowed loudly for Mrs. Brewer, and when she came forth, he paid her the rent due next Saturday night, although it was only Tuesday.

Who were the people in the first-flight-front square room? That was what Corry wanted to know of Mrs. Brewer, in fair exchange for his advanced room rent.

Mrs. Brewer lowered her considerable bulk cautiously to the lower stair of the basement flight. She eyed him shrewdly.

Was he going to make a nuisance of himself all the time, then, like Mr. Glynn was doing, by peeking continual over the banisters to get a squint at a girl that Mrs. Brewer didn't consider any such raving beauty? Was he, now? That was what Mrs. Brewer wanted to know before she went any further.

Corry felt the hot blood rushing into

his cheeks. He denied any such intention. Mrs. Brewer expressed her doubt in a crooked smile.

Well, then, he'd find out, anyway, who they were, so she'd tell him herself they were quiet, respectable people, a mother and a daughter, Mrs. Mellor and Miss Pamela Mellor. They had brought the best of references. Mrs. Brewer called on Corry and Heaven to witness how careful she was about the people she let into her house. The mother went out days in a plain black dress. Mrs. Brewer thought she sewed. The daughter had a night job somewhere. She went out every night about seven, and at about eleven Mrs. Mellor went out and came back with her. No, Mrs. Brewer didn't know what the job was. Maybe an actress. She didn't look like it, though; she wasn't pretty enough nor had she the style and the dash of such actresses as Mrs. Brewer had briefly and more or less regretfully harbored at odd times of poor business. Maybe she was a night cashier at a lunch place, or some kind of a teacher, or read to people; Mrs. Brewer had once had a lodger who read people to sleep and made good money out of it. Anyway, all Mrs. Brewer knew was that the girl went out, as she said, and her mother went out later and came back with her. With an unpleasant sniff, the portly lady on the lower stair declared that she was not so inquisitive about other people's business as lots of other people were.

Corry, reddening again, advanced yet another week's rent and went upstairs. Because he had pressing need of expressing himself at the moment, and because there was no other method open to him of such expression, he resumed his dance of youth and spring and all that is glad and joyous in the world, including dull gray bath wrappers with rabbits swarming over them. His exuberant steps set the floor atremble. They sounded overloud in the room be-

low, where Stanley Glynn was banging out verse on the typewriter. It was very bad verse. That goes without saying. The edge of paper above the worn old platen of the typewriter bore the title: "To P. M. M." Miss Mellor's middle name was Martha. Stanley had

Stanley liked those lines immensely. They expressed his meaning so fully and thoroughly. But just now he wanted a rhyming word for "Pamela." It looked like a tough contract, too.

Several scales of kalsomine, loosened by Corry's joyous steps, fluttered down upon Mr. Glynn's half-finished work of prosody. He scowled and shook his fist in the general direction of the room above.

Despite his denials of ever contemplating such a course, Corry Hogan's head was thrust over the banisters every night



With an unpleasant sniff, the portly lady on the lower stair declared that she was not so inquisitive about other people's business as lots of other people were.

discovered this from letters on the hat-rack by the front door.

Below the title, had you been looking over Stanley's shoulder, you might have read the first two lines:

Out of my dark two star eyes shine,
And they are thine.

at half past eleven, when Pamela Mellor and her mother came in. A disinterested person would have seen a tired-looking, patient, colorless woman of middle age, climbing the long, half-lighted flight of stairs in the wake of a petulant younger woman, who was

rather pretty, perhaps, in a certain doll-like fashion, and who bade fair to have just about as much gray matter under her wavy brown hair as the doll she resembled.

Corry's eyes, not being wholly disinterested, saw nothing at all like that. The old woman might have been dropped out of the picture entirely so far as he was concerned. He didn't see her at all. The younger woman was all he beheld on those dingy stairs, and she was the eternal youth and the eternal love and the eternal delight that his feet told about until the wee, small hours of the morning, while the kalsomine scales rattled down on Stanley Glynn at his typewriter, sweating over the master poem of all the ages.

Corry thought the girl looked frailer and more tired and more desirable with each passing night. He wished he could do something for her. He wished the wages were better in the molding room at the brass foundry. His wages had become wholly inadequate in his eyes. It was tough for a girl like that to be working nights. It was tough for a girl to have to work. Corry was seized with that wholly unique feeling of wanting to rush out and hog tie the whole world for her and lay it at her feet.

Corry Hogan came out of the stage door of the old Star Theater, that Saturday evening in late December, feeling very much like a man who has put the noose about his own neck and is only waiting now to kick over the box on which he stands. On Sunday nights the Star tries out new talent between the reels of the thrillers its audiences demand. It is not particularly hard to get a hearing at the Star. If you have a symptom of talent, they'll let you go on and stay as long as either you or the audience can or will stand it. Moreover, it is whispered that there are keen and knowing eyes watching from

the Star's Sunday-night audiences. This may or may not be so. But certain it is that the rumor persists, and the Star is not at all averse to profiting thereby as much as possible.

Corry had sought the office of the Star's house manager. He had quavered and coughed and stammered and finally made known his desires. Also, he had done a few turns for the bored, apoplectic-looking man at the littered desk.

The latter had ceased suddenly to be bored, but he hadn't let Corry see it. He had sat twiddling judicious thumbs when the few steps—and, in his perturbation you may be sure they were nowhere near Corry's best—were over. Then he had consulted a sheet of paper before him and lighted the ragged cigar stub in his mouth, which had gone out.

"Le's see!" he had muttered. "Yep, they is a chance for you. Feller that was goin' to do some ballads has been took sick."

He had drawn a pen several times through one line on the paper and written something else in a finer hand above the crossed-out name.

"C'm on down at nine-ten. We'll give you a show then. Nine-ten you go on. Got it?"

Corry had nodded, mumbled something intended for thanks, and backed toward the door.

"'N' say, kid," the man at the desk had added, with a sudden gruff kindness, "you ain't so bad—not so bad if you'll let yerself go and not be so stiff. Nine-ten. Be here then, sharp!"

Corry went home. He spent the evening in close communion with a series of unpleasant nervous shivers. Only the sight of Pamela Mellor coming up the stairs late in the evening gave him courage to face the morrow.

The Sunday *Orbit* has a Poets' Corner. It encourages original verse to the tune of one dollar per accepted

product. The general opinion of those who have the temerity to peruse this department—it is next the page of household recipes—is that the contributors get off easy with anything lighter than the death sentence.

Gentle old "Pop" Bagley—who for years has conducted this particular offense and has fought for its continuance against all odds—being down with lumbago, Lamby Larkins was having a hack at it, and Lamby was employing methods that would have wrung Pop's soul with anguish had he known of them—which he didn't.

Lamby looked at a memorandum Pop had left for his understudy. He noted the number of lines the Poets' Corner carried. Then he seized two handfuls of folded manuscripts from the pigeon-holes of Pop's desk, opened them, and began to count lines, without bothering to read them. Lamby, having once perused the Poets' Corner, was sure he could get away with it.

All of which explains how it happens that, on a certain Sunday morning in late December, a bit of verse, "To P. M. M.," signed by Stanley Maurice Glynn appeared in the Poets' Corner of the *Orbit*. It was the same Sunday morning when Corry Hogan, awaking in his three-flights-back hall room, remembered, and wished most devoutly that he had never been born. Or did wish so until he brought to mind how very tired Pamela Mellor had looked as she had climbed the stairs the night before—how thin and frail and pale and like a flower. Then he shivered, smiled, shivered again, and went to sleep smiling.

At eight minutes past nine that night, Corry Hogan stood in the wings of the Star, his lips hot and burning, his throat behaving in a wholly unseemly fashion, his hands clutching the seams at the sides of his trousers legs. A highly excited youth, who had just made a hit

with some juggling he had done with lighted lamps, was taking his third call—taking it with a whole-hearted delight and an awkwardness that sent the packed house off into howls of glee.

Then the youth came stumbling off and disappeared in the gloom beyond. The orchestra began a sorry rendition of the "Spring Song." Somebody shoved Corry forward with a "Now, youse!"

He found himself stumbling over a surface that seemed to rise and fall in waves. The glare of lights was in his eyes. Beyond, a sea of dim faces, only their foreheads and eyes uncannily visible to him, seemed enveloped in one huge, expectant, diabolical grin. He all but collided with a large placard on an easellike affair, which announced:

MONSIEUR CORRIE

In

THE DANCE OF THE SEASONS

Some one tittered. Corry looked wildly back to the wings he had just quitted, the friendly wings, the sheltering wings. A man there in shirt sleeves, with his hat far back on his head and an unlighted cigar in the corner of his mouth, made gestures at him, threatening gestures. Also, out of the corner of his mouth he commanded thickly:

"Go wan! Go wan! Watcher waitin' for? Get some action! Some action!"

The titter was augmented by many others. Some one across those blinding lights laughed outright. The fumes of rank tobacco came drifting down from the balcony, where smoking was permitted.

A thin, falsetto voice taunted: "Where's its marmer? Find its marmer for it!"

Corry knew then it was all off. His legs seemed caving under him. His hands and arms were numb. He took one step in retreat. And then the girl at the piano in the orchestra pit glanced up. There were six girls in the orches-

tra beside the men—three on the violins, one on the cello, one on the clarinet, and this one at the piano.

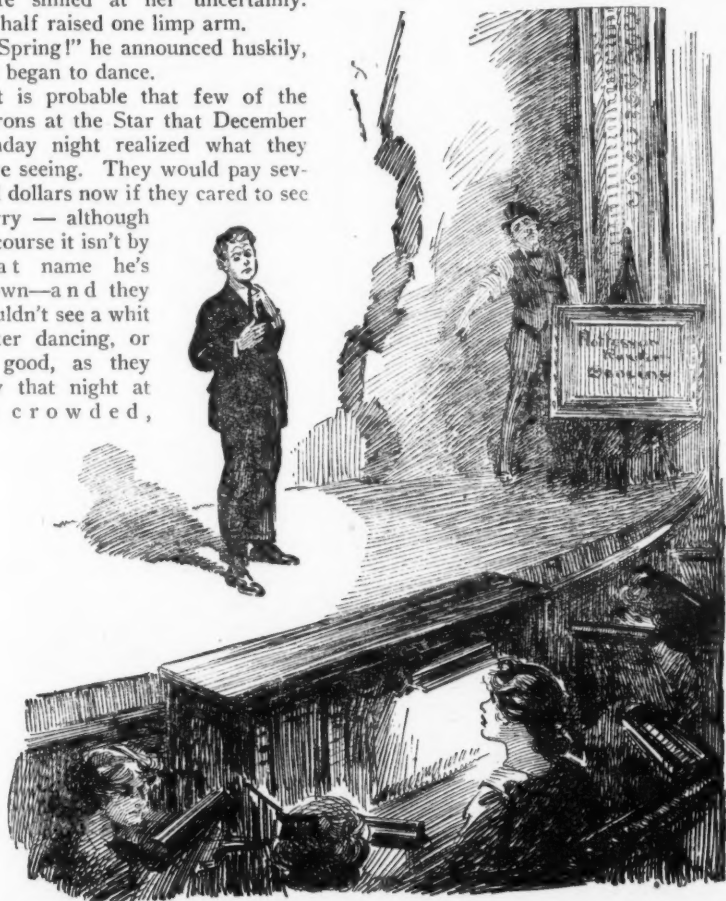
Corry's frame stiffened. He came nearer the footlights. The blood surged back in his pale face. The girl at the piano was Pamela Mellor. He was doing this for her—he was going through this ordeal for her. Somehow she would know it, she would feel it; she was that kind of a girl.

He smiled at her uncertainly. He half raised one limp arm.

"Spring!" he announced huskily, and began to dance.

It is probable that few of the patrons at the Star that December Sunday night realized what they were seeing. They would pay several dollars now if they cared to see Corry — although of course it isn't by that name he's known—and they wouldn't see a whit better dancing, or as good, as they saw that night at the crowded,

smoky, smelly old Star. Corry never has and never will dance better than he danced that night. It was as if he had forgotten the faces across the lights utterly; as if he were dancing for the girl at the piano and for her alone. The patrons of the Star understood but little of the meaning of it all, but that they liked it they were sure, and that knowledge was quite sufficient for them.



The girl at the piano glanced up. Corry's frame stiffened. The blood surged back in his pale face.

Corry, flushed, atremble with triumph, master of himself now, came before them again and again. And the house manager of the Star was waiting for him in the wings, wondering just how much Corry knew of his own abilities.

Corry waited at the stage door for Pamela and her mother to come out when the show was over. But when they did come, it was like him to follow them home at a distance. It was only when they were unlocking the front door that he found the courage to make open approach.

He trailed them up the dark stairs, striking matches and holding them high to light the way. At the door of their room at the head of that first flight, Mrs. Mellor thoughtfully slipped inside, leaving them there together in the dark hallway.

"So you've ambitions, have you, Mr. Hogan?" said the girl, a little sharply.

"I hadn't—not till I saw you," said Corry. "Look! I'd rather be shot than go through anything like that again. I—I just knew you worked somewhere, and that you hadn't oughter be workin'—that you're too pretty and too slight to be workin' like you are. And a place like that—the Star— Gee, it's fierce! I hadn't no idea you worked in a place so fierce as that."

"Well, what in the world is it to you where I work?" said she.

"Everything," said he, boldly now. "I was tryin' out there to-night because I thought maybe, if I made more money, if there was anything comin' out of my dancin' like a lot of guys has been tryin' to tell me there would be, I'd like to make it easier for you. I was ready to quit till I saw you there at the piano and knew that was where you worked. I'd 'a' made good then if I'd had to kill the whole bunch to do it."

"I work in a brass foundry. The wages there ain't enough for two to live

like they oughter. But to-night I got a job right there at the Star, workin' nights a while, that's goin' to bring me in a good little wad, and the feller there, the manager, says he'll put me up the line till I'm makin' all kinds of coin. I done it for you, to make it easier for you—and the old lady," he added. "Get me?"

"Why, I don't know you hardly, and—and—"

"And what?"

"And I couldn't, anyway. I couldn't," she said, so low that he could scarcely hear her.

The door opened and closed. She was gone. Corry groped for the banisters of the next flight. He found them, stumbled up three stairs, and stood staring up at two stars he could see through the skylight at the top of the house.

"Gee, look what I been through for nothin'—for nothin'!" he groaned.

Mrs. Mellor was pretending to take down her hair as her daughter came in. In reality it was all pretense. She had been listening with bent head at the key-hole.

"That Mr. Hogan seems a sterling sort of chap. I like him real well," she quavered hopefully.

The girl made no answer for a time. She slipped out of her street clothes and, donning the dull gray bath robe with the sportive white rabbits on it, she curled herself comfortably in a big chair of faded plush near the window. She had a clipping in her hand.

"Mr. Hogan?" she said at length. "Nothin' doin', dearie. He's an awful roughneck. Did you know there was a poem about me in the *Orbit* to-day? Yes, honest there was. It's 'To P. M. M.'. That's me. There ain't a doubt of it, because Mr. Glynn told me he meant me. It's grand. Listen:

"Out of my dark two star eyes shine,
And they are thine—"

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NEW YORK STAGE SUCCESSSES

Eyes of Youth

By Max Marcin and
Charles Guernon



Marjorie Rambeau, who plays the
part of *Gina Ashling*.

A GLIMPSE into the future! Can there be anything quite so fascinating? To come to a parting of the ways, to hesitate as to which of various courses to take, and then suddenly to see mirrored before one the results of following each—say three years, five years, hence—what a miracle to enthrall the interest of any human!

To Gina Ashling in her home one evening, singing for her friends and for Signor Salvo, operatic impresario, the miracle happens, and most convincingly.

Fired with enthusiasm for Gina's naturally beautiful voice, Signor Salvo offers to take her to Paris, in care of himself and his wife, to have her trained for opera, agreeing to pay all the expenses involved if Gina will give only the hardest of faithful work and sign a contract to appear under his management for a term of years. Gina's father and young sister, Rita, object to the plan. So, too, do her three suitors, Peter Judson, a young mining engineer, Louis Anthony, a goody-goody sort with a mean streak, and Robert Goring, a wealthy man about town. They all attempt to dissuade her from so much as considering the proposition.

Only her young brother, Kenneth, a boy with ambitions and none of the selfish motives entertained by the others,

seeing a possible great future for Gina, urges her to accept Signor Salvo's splendid offer. But Gina, who has a very deep sense of duty to her family, hesitates, begging for time to consider and to talk over the matter alone with her father. As the others go into the dining room for refreshment, Louis and Kenneth wait to speak to her.

LOUIS: Before making up your mind, Gina, I hope you will consider your duty. Rita and Kenneth need you at home. If they had a mother, it would be different. If anything should happen to them, you'd never forgive yourself for having failed to look after them. I want to have a talk with you alone.

KENNETH: Say, sis, if you want to go, don't let Rita and me stand in the way for a minute. Why, I'd be tickled to death to quit school and go into business with father.

GINA: Of course you would, Kenny.

Gina learns from her father that his financial affairs are in distressful condition, and that the family living must soon be on a different scale. To her it suddenly seems that Signor Salvo's offer is a veritable Godsend, for if she succeeds, there will be no limit to the things she can do for them. But her father objects to Salvo, and warns her

By permission of A. H. Woods and the Messrs. Shubert, producers.



Standing, left to right: Peter Judson, Robert Goring, Kenneth, Louis Anthony, Rita. Seated: Gina.
KENNETH: "Say, sis, if you want to go, don't let Rita and me stand in the way for a minute."

against the pitfalls of a career and the big "if" involved, suggesting that she can at once make things easy for all of them by accepting Robert Goring's proposal of marriage. To Gina, who does not love Goring, the thought is a horrible one, and she asks if her happiness is to count for nothing.

ASHLING: How do you know you'd be unhappy with him? And what guarantee have you that you'd be happy with some one else?

GINA: I don't know. I have none—unfortunately.

ASHLING: Your marriage to Goring would secure your own future. Why not look to that?

GINA (*looking musingly into space*):

If only we could look ahead—into the future—wouldn't it be wonderful!

Just then there appears at the outer doorway, impressively outlined against the darkness of the night, the figure of a yogi peddler, dressed in semi-Oriental garb and carrying a heavy case. He apologizes for his intrusion and seeks to know if he can interest mem-sahib in some Oriental jewelry. Mr. Ashling orders him away, but before he can reach the door, he collapses in faintness from hunger and the heat. Gina, all compassion, asks her father to take the yogi to the kitchen for food and drink. As they go out, Peter comes back to Gina to urge her to marry him instead of going to Paris

for a career. Very earnest and tender he is. Not yet can he offer her wealth, but he has a wonderful opportunity to go to South America, and bright hopes for the future.

But Gina, who cares for Peter, cannot decide. There is so much to consider. Duty to others looms large in her consciousness, and the thought comes to her that if she couldn't sacrifice, she wouldn't be worthy of any man's love. Her brain is in a whirl. That she may think it all over, she sends Peter away just as the yogi re-enters the room. The latter hears her longing cry, "Oh, if one could only see ahead—into the future!" Humbly he suggests that perhaps he can help her.

YOGI: In India, mem-sahib, we have been seeking in the unknown for many thousands of years. It would be surprising if we had learned nothing at all, would it not?

GINA: Oh—I'd—I don't know what I wouldn't give to see a few years ahead—just a glimpse! But I can't really, can I?

YOGI: A little—yes. You see, time is like space. There is no past or future in time, any more than in space. Each stretches to infinity—to eternity in every direction. Thus we can, when we have learned how, look at the future as easily as at the past. (*Opens bag, takes out crystal.*) If you will take this little crystal and concentrate your gaze upon it, it will show you three things. With it you may pro-

ject yourself forward—say five years—at your discretion, and from that point in time, you will be enabled to look back upon those five years as if they had actually passed and you had lived through the experiences there recorded. You will see just what you have let those five years make of you—whether your spirit has gone forward and upward or not.

GINA (*taking crystal*): Then if I see that decision is a mistake, I still may decide differently?

YOGI: Yes. But let me caution you. Do not judge of the matter from a material, but from a spiritual, point of



But, Gina, who cares for Peter, cannot decide. There is so much to consider.

view. And remember that you have but three opportunities. Use them wisely.

GINA: Oh—is it my duty to stay at home? I wonder—

YOGI: This will tell you. Keep your gaze fixed upon it.

GINA: But I don't see anything. What shall I do?

YOGI (*leaving the room*): Believe—and desire with a pure heart.

GINA (*after a slight pause*): Oh—oh, it's getting cloudy—look! And it turns all sorts of colors! Why, it's getting bigger! There are figures moving about! See! See!

And to the trembling girl, gazing excitedly into the crystal ball, appears

EPISODE THE FIRST.

The scene is a classroom in a public school, five years later. Gina, in faded black, is seated at the teacher's desk, facing a dozen or more unruly boys and girls. She has lost her beauty, her eyes are without a sparkle, her features withered and drawn. Before giving the children a half holiday to see the circus, Gina requests them to tidy their desks. They are impudent and disorderly. She wearily endeavors to teach them something of the animals they will see at the circus, but on account of beanshooters, chewing gum, pertness, and general impatience to be off, the attempt is anything but successful. Suddenly she gains their attention with the announcement that is her last day as their teacher. She comes down among them and they gather about her.

GINA (*in a voice trembling with feeling*): You know I love you. I know that in your hearts you all love me, but the trustees have decided that I am no longer suitable for you—that my ways are hopelessly old-fashioned. So, to-morrow, a new teacher is coming. I want you to be good to the new teacher. I want her to feel that you have been taught to be kind and considerate and regardful of others. I know that in your hearts you are that way. But sometimes I do want you to think of the old teacher who is saying good-by to you to-day. It just breaks my heart. I—I—

Some of the children burst into tears, others ask forgiveness for having been bad, and all refuse to leave her until she drives them away. When the last child has gone, and Gina has broken down, sobbing despairingly, her sister Rita, now grown into a wonderfully pretty girl, trips in to tell her that Louis Anthony is her accepted lover. It was Louis who once professed love for Gina herself and asked her to wait for him. He suddenly seems to her an unutterable cad, and when he presently calls for Rita, Gina turns upon him bitterly and warns Rita of his treachery.

GINA: He lied to you, Rita. It was through his convincing me that it was my duty to stay at home and guide you and Kenneth in paths of righteousness as you grew up, and to nurse and look after father, that—I—I— Eventually, when Louis had made enough money for me to live on, I was to marry him. It was my *duty* to stay at home—it was my *duty* to marry him, because then father would not lose a daughter, but gain a son! Those were your very words, Louis. It was for this alone—this idea of duty—that I gave up all thought of a career. It was because of this that I refused to marry Peter.

RITA: I don't care whether it's the truth or not. I hate you, Gina! You're jealous because you're a crabbed old maid. And because nobody cares for you any more, you'd ruin my life, too!

LOUIS (*angrily*): Because, it's just as Rita said, you're so confoundedly crabbed! Ever since you got the news of Peter Judson's death in South America, you've been different. And after your illness, when you found your voice was gone, you simply settled down into a typical old maid. Why, you're no more like the girl I knew then than Rita is like you now!

Gina can endure no more, and begs them to leave her. Even her brother, who has turned out a good-for-nothing, comes in to reproach her. Robert Goring has married, and Peter Judson lost his life in the Brazilian jungle, while she has been devoting herself to duty and her unappreciative family. Great sobs rack her soul. But at length she



GINA: "Oh—is it my duty to stay at home? I wonder—"

YOGI: "This will tell you. Keep your gaze fixed upon it. Believe—and desire with a pure heart."

raises her head from the desk and, looking straight in front of her, cries bitterly: "Duty—duty!"

With a wild cry, as if waking from a dream, but still gazing at the crystal, Gina comes back to the present. Bewildered, she looks up to see Louis crossing the room to her. He has been waiting to speak to her alone, and to offer her a position as teacher in the public school.

GINA (*still blinking her eyes*): No—I—I—can't accept it. Thank you, just the same.

LOUIS (*astonished*): You won't take it? Why, I thought you'd be glad of the chance!

GINA (*reminiscently*): I might have been—but not now.

LOUIS: You're not going to accept Mr. Salvo's offer and become an opera singer, are you?

GINA: Perhaps.

LOUIS: Oh, you can't do that, Gina! I am afraid to speak of it, but you know how much I care for you. I have always loved you, Gina, and if you'll only wait until I'm in a position to support a wife—

GINA: Please don't! I forbid you to say anything more!

LOUIS: At any rate, as an old friend of the family, with its welfare at heart, you'll let me urge you not to go away. Why, it would be reprehensible for you to shirk your duty!

When the yogi reenters the room, Gina is talking with Signor Salvo. The latter is recognized as a musician whom the yogi heard play in India many years before. Gina explains that Signor Salvo is now one of the foremost operatic managers, and that he is trying to convince her that she has a great voice



GINA: "Oh—oh—it's getting cloudy—look! And it turns all sorts of colors! Why, it's getting bigger! There are figures moving about! See! see!"

with the promise of a wonderful career.

SALVO: Ah, the dear God have give you a marvelous voice! *Cara mia*, you cannot think of refusing my offer. Come, w'at you say?

GINA: I don't know what to say. *(She looks at the yogi, meets his gaze, and gives a slight tremor. She turns to the crystal; her eyes wander back to the yogi. A dreamy expression begins to cross her face, as if she were slowly coming under an hypnotic spell.)*

YOGI (to SALVO): Would the sahib condescend to do a great favor for a humble yogi? Would he not play the beautiful "Moonlight Sonata," which I had the great pleasure of hearing him play in India?

SALVO (in disgust): No, not now!

GINA: Please. For me.

SALVO (kissing her hand): I am delight' to play eet for you.

As the opening strains of Beethoven's famous sonata come from the music room, Gina dazedly lifts the crystal and in it sees

EPISODE THE SECOND.

In the elaborately furnished dressing room of the star of the Paris Opéra House, a maid is arranging some costumes, while Signor Salvo attempts to pacify and reassure the excitable manager of the opera, Piquard. For the third time in a week, Gina has been so late that an

understudy has had to go on for her. She is so arrogant and independent that she is ruining the discipline of the whole company, and arousing Piquard's wrath.

PIQUARD (wringing his hands): *Mon Dieu!* Ze opera eet ees to her nozzing! All she theenk about ees ze cabaret—ze gay life—ze millionaires! Already she ees grow notorious. Soon her career, eet will be ruin'! Eef she disappoint to-night, wiz her I am feenish! *Comprenes vous—feenish!* *(Exits.)*

SALVO (despairingly): I don't know what to do. I am doing the best I can. Oh, *Dios mio*, soon I weel go crazy! *(He paces the floor.)*

At last the tardy prima donna enters. She is stunningly gowned in gorgeous evening costume, with beautiful furs and jewels. Her face is flushed, and from her bold, unsteady manner it is evident that she has been dining and wining too well. Contemptuously she replies to Salvo when he reproaches her and urges her to hurry.

GINA: Oh, there's plenty of time! They can hold the curtain. What do I care?

SALVO: Some night dey weel not hold de curtain, and eet weel

be your feenish. Eet ees hard to believe you could change so in such a short time!

GINA: Whose fault is it?

SALVO: Ah, now you reproach me!



GINA: "There, there, you musn't cry. You may go to the circus, too."



Gina, Rita, and Louis Anthony.

RITA: "I don't care whether it's the truth or not. I hate you, Gina! You're jealous because you're a crabbed old maid. And because nobody cares for you any more, you'd ruin my life, too!"

Do you think *I* like eet dat you go out wid dese men?

GINA: Oh, I get your meaning. You'd prefer that I see no one but you. Well, I'm going out with whom I like and as often as I like. And it wouldn't hurt my feelings if I never saw you again! (*Pushes SALVO in the face.*)

SALVO (*sobbing*): Dat ees de gratitude!

GINA: I don't owe you anything, and you know it! Get out! I'm going to change my clothes. (*Stamping her foot.*) Get out! Exit!

When Gina learns that Carrillo, the tenor, is ill and that she is to sing opposite an understudy, she falls into a rage, sends for Piquard, and refuses absolutely to go on. In despair, the excited Piquard, who cannot afford to put

on two understudies in leading parts at one performance, pleads with her and threatens an end to her career. But Gina, furiously smoking cigarettes, snaps her fingers at him and orders him out of the room. When her brother Kenneth comes in to beg her to sing and to remonstrate with her against the loose life she is leading, she laughs sneeringly at the idea of *his* giving her a lecture on social etiquette, and bluntly tells him to mind his own business.

KENNETH: Chuck these men, dear. Don't have anything more to do with them. They're no help to you. You've made a wonderful hit with your voice. You've got a chance to be a great singer. Don't throw it away for these miserable animals that a few years ago you would not have sat down to the table with!



GINA: "To-morrow morning a new teacher is coming. I want you to be good to the new teacher——"

LOUIS: "I *must* speak. I have always loved you, Gina, and if only you'll wait until I'm in a position to support a wife——" GINA: "I forbid you to say anything more!"



GINA: "What do I care! If they don't like it, let them put on the understudy."

GINA: See here, Kenneth, you've got nothing to complain of. I'm giving you a start in life—

KENNETH: I'm not complaining! I appreciate all you've done for all of us.

GINA: Then shut up and leave the method to me. What's the matter with you? Do you think money grows on bushes? Do you know what it costs to live? What it costs for your education—for Rita and father? Why, my salary here hardly pays for my clothes, and you tell me to chuck Larry Watkins and Hal Price! Both millionaires! You're crazy!

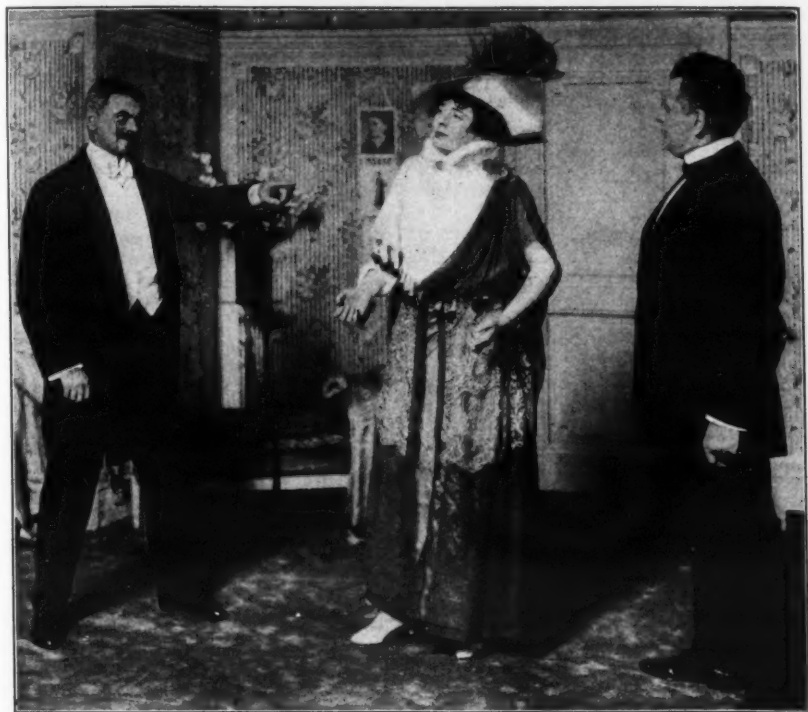
KENNETH (*in anguished tones*): Do you mean to say it's true? All this talk about you and these men?

GINA: For Heaven's sake, Kenneth, haven't you learned anything about life? Do you suppose I've reached the position I'm in to-day by sitting around with my hands clasped and my eyes lifted, in sanctimonious prudery? You are a fool! I'll have a dozen lovers if I choose! If you fancy I've toiled and sweated to get where I am just to be a money machine for you three, you're jolly well mistaken! I've done all the work I intend to do! Now I'm going to enjoy life, and anybody that doesn't like it— (*Shrugs expressively.*) Now you get out of here, or I'll have you thrown out!

KENNETH (*masterfully*): You'll do as I say, from now on.

In the meantime, the performance has gone on, the new soprano has made a tremendous hit, and Piquard hurries back to tell Gina once more that he is through with her. Deeply disappointed, Salvo reproaches her as an ingrate, and from the bitter recriminations Gina hurls back at him, Kenneth learns that Salvo has been his sister's lover from the first. He picks up a pistol from the table and shoots. Gina screams as Salvo falls dead.

The final chords of the sonata come from the music room. Gina sits staring intently into the crystal. Suddenly she gives a suppressed scream like that of a person



GINA: "No use your waiting, Piquard. Get out!" PIQUARD: "Very well, I go. But you better theenk eet over. Your stubbornness—eet will cost you your entire career!"

emerging from a painful dream. Then she murmurs, "Kenneth—no—no!" When Salvo hurries in, she rises, looking at him in bewilderment.

GINA: Signor, I am going to be frank with you. Conditions in my family compel me to think of earning a livelihood. I know that my one great chance is my voice. And yet—I don't know—but somehow—something seems to hold me back.

SALVO (*pointing to crystal*): Eet ees dat nonsense. Come, you must be practicable. Reason eet out for yourself.

GINA (*with slow resolution*): Yes, I guess you are right. I shouldn't be so stupid as to put faith in a thing like that. Why, to take it seriously for a moment—I ought to be ashamed!

KENNETH (*entering*): Well, Mr. Salvo, you've convinced my sister?

SALVO (*happily*): Your sister, she have decide' to become a great artist!

KENNETH (*overjoyed*): Oh, Gina! Won't it be wonderful to have a famous opera star in the family! (*Hesitating*) Mr. Salvo, you've made my sister a wonderful offer. I hope she makes good, and that she'll be the means of making a great deal of money for you. There is just one thing I want to tell you. You are a prominent manager; that is all we know about you. My sister is going away; it will be the first time we have ever been separated. We are trusting her to you.

SALVO: I am delight' to have de responsibility.

KENNETH (*earnestly*): If anything should happen to her—you know what I mean—I am her brother, and just as sure as there's a God above us—I'll kill the man that's responsible!

GINA (*with a great cry*): Kenneth! Kenneth! (*She runs to him and holds him shelteringly in her arms.*) No—no—no, Mr. Salvo, I've decided not to go! Not to go!

The curtain goes up on Act III. with Mr. Ashling and Mr. Goring attempting to bribe the yogi.

ASHLING: You understand, Goring and I don't take any stock in this crystal gazing, or hypnotism, or sleight-of-hand, or whatever it is you practice. But you bamboozled my daughter, and I'm much obliged.

GORING: Now, if you'll do it again, but this time make her see the advantage of accepting my offer of marriage—

YOGI: It is a very big service you are asking.

GORING: I'm willing to pay, and pay high.

YOGI: I am sorry, but I cannot control Miss Ashling's destiny. What would you have her see?

GORING: The things which I can do for her. Why, as my wife, the specter of poverty would disappear out of her life forever. It would mean assured comfort for her father—opportunity for her brother and sister—and the joy of living for her. I want her more than anything else in the world. Now, will you help me?

YOGI: I can help *her*. If mem-sahib will gaze once more into the crystal, she shall see what wealth can do for her.

But when Gina is told by the yogi that if her problem is not yet solved, she has the privilege of once more consulting the crystal, she shrinks back, crying "No, no—not that!"

YOGI: If mem-sahib is afraid, permit me to quote from your own religion: "Ye shall know the *truth*, and the truth shall make ye free."

GINA: But isn't *duty right*, then?

YOGI: But duty done in violation of

the laws of life is a weak yielding to the selfishness of others.

GINA: Is there no beauty in ambition then? (*She shudders at the memory.*)

YOGI: If the desire is pure, then only is ambition beautiful.

GINA: But I am thinking only of others. On my decision rests *their* whole future! If I marry Mr. Goring, where—where would it lead to? (*She looks down involuntarily at the crystal.*)

YOGI: You have asked the question. Look!

GINA (*dreamily*): Where would it lead to? Where—

Gazing into the crystal, she becomes lost in

EPISODE THE THIRD.

In the private chambers of a judge, a divorce trial is proceeding. Lawyers and witnesses are present. Robert Goring is the plaintiff, and Gina, his wife, the defendant. The most important witness against Gina is Louis Anthony. The case is evidently a "frame-up," and the witnesses have been so well coached in innuendo and perjury against Gina that all her clever lawyer can do is to move for a dismissal, and ask that all the plaintiff's witnesses be committed for conspiracy and perjury. But the judge denies the motion, saying that he fails to see the slightest evidence of any conspiracy outside the statement of defendant's counsel.

JUDGE (*turning to GINA*): Madam, do you acknowledge this charge against you?

GINA: Acknowledge it? No! (*Contemptuously*) You have heard the evidence given here by these witnesses. You have heard that a woman, the wife of a man of wealth and prominence, deliberately left her home and went to a cheap and vulgar road house—to meet a mincing teacher of fox trots!

JUDGE (*rapping his desk*): Silence, madam!

GINA: I will not be silent! You have heard me charged with the lowest and

most repulsive conduct, a charge which is shocking to any but the most abandoned creature. You have heard the miserable hirelings of this man, without mercy and without conscience, swear upon the word of God that this woman is an outcast—

GORING'S LAWYER: Your honor, I object. If she has anything to say—

GINA: Lost to all sense of decency and reason. And you sit calmly by while a woman's soul is thrown into the very sewers of life and dragged through the filth of this man's selfishness, when the merest child could see the truth!

GORING'S LAWYER: If she has a denial to make, the witness stand is her place.

GINA: Why deny something that refutes itself? Ask him—ask my husband—ask Louis Anthony, who telephoned to me at my home that my husband had been taken ill at that road house. Ask *them* who it was that told me to hurry to his side if I wanted to see him alive. They know who it was—I don't. They had the trap all set for me when I got there.

JUDGE: Madam, if you wish to tell your story, you will have to observe the decorum of a court of justice.

GINA: Justice? If this is justice—then I say God help every woman!

The case is closed with the recommendation that the plaintiff be granted a divorce.

The scene changes to the street in front of Rector's Restaurant, two years later. Entering the doorway, Robert Goring meets Salvo and Piquard. They inquire most eagerly for Gina, but Goring tells them he has been divorced for two years, and has not the faintest idea what has become of her. Shortly after they leave, Peter Judson and a



PETER: "Don't think all men are like him. Gina, I want to see you as you were. You've changed outwardly, but I believe you are the same girl within. Now come, let me take you home."

handsomely dressed young woman come out of the restaurant, the latter dropping her gold mesh bag, unnoticed, and go up the street. From the shadows near by creeps a frail, shabbily dressed woman, evidently ill. It is the wreck of Gina Ashling. She picks up the

mesh bag just as Dick Carson, a detective from headquarters, appears. He takes the bag from her.

GINA (*protestingly, in hollow tones*): I didn't steal it. Honest, I didn't. A woman just dropped it. I didn't know what to do with it. I was afraid, if I called her, she would have me arrested.

CARSON: Never have been arrested, I suppose?

GINA: No, no! Let me go! I haven't done anything!

CARSON: Wait a minute. I want to talk to you. This isn't the first time I've seen you around here.

GINA: No, I come up here lots of times.

By questioning her, Carson learns that she is "on the level," that she lives by sometimes getting a job singing in cafés, that she has been very ill and is just out of the hospital, and that she has once been something better and has taken morphine—to forget.

CARSON: You live down on Center Street and you come up here—what for?

GINA (*after a slight pause*): You'll laugh when I tell you—you'll laugh. I like to watch these swell beggars come out of here. I see the women with their thousand-dollar opera capes—and their jeweled slippers—and their diamonds, calling their limousines—and I laugh because they seem so sure of their positions in life, because they think they are always going to have the clothes and jewels and expensive limousines. They don't stop to think that all they have on their backs and all they stuff into their stomachs depends upon the whim of some man—that some night their good, kind husband may forget the little gold band he put on her finger, and for some just or unjust cause throw her out into the streets like a tramp. *That's* why I come here. *That's* why I laugh. I've got a laugh coming, haven't I?

Carson is sympathetic and offers to help her to cut out the morphine and get on her feet again. Pulling herself together, Gina gratefully accepts his kindness. Just then Peter Judson comes hurrying back in search of the gold

mesh bag that has been lost. It is restored to him, and as he turns to thank Gina with a reward, he recognizes her.

PETER: My God, Gina!

GINA: I thought you were in South America.

PETER: I've been back for over a year. I heard about the divorce. Nobody could tell me what had become of you, but I have always hoped some day to find you.

GINA: Find me? What for?

PETER: Don't you know? Can't you guess? Think back!

GINA: No, no, I don't want to think back. I don't want to think back. There's your wife's purse. She'll be anxious about it. (*Gently pushes him away.*)

PETER: I'm not married, Gina—it's just a friend that I took to the theater. Where do you live?

GINA: Down on Center Street.

PETER: How do you live?

GINA: I sing once in a while, but I haven't been singing lately. I've been sick. I've been in the hospital.

PETER: What are you doing up here?

GINA: Oh, I'm not what you think—not what you think!

PETER: Oh, Gina, there is so much I could do now—so much I'd like to do! I want to see you as you were. You've changed outwardly, but I believe you are the same girl within. Now come, let me take you home. I'm not going to lose you again.

GINA (*with a tremor*): What do you mean?

PETER: I mean there is still a lot of happiness in store for both of us.

GINA: Happiness for me—for me! I'm tired, Peter, I'm tired. (*She falls fainting into his arms.*)

Slowly Gina comes back again to the present. Her father entering, with Goring's name on his lips, she eagerly interrupts.

GINA: Father, I can't marry Mr. Goring. I want to do what's best for all of us, but that's not the way. I know how easily Mr. Goring could smooth away all our financial troubles. But that isn't all of life; it's the least



GINA: "Kenneth! Kenneth!" (She holds him shelteringly in her arms.) "No—no—no, Mr. Salvo, I've decided not to go! Not to go!"

of it. You asked me how I knew that I couldn't be happy with him. Well, I do know, dear—it doesn't matter how. We can't buy happiness; we must earn it. And nothing good ever came of doing the wrong thing, even to help others!

ASHLING: You looked into that crystal. Say, that yogi double-crossed us! But, dear child, I don't want you to do anything that will make you unhappy. Only, what are we to do?

GINA: Do! Why, father, you talk as if you were a useless old man. Why not look at things with eyes of youth? Take Kenneth—with his youth and enthusiasm and fresh viewpoint, and your experience, you could rehabilitate the business.

ASHLING (*thoughtfully*): By Jove, I believe you're right! Why, there's nothing to it—nothing to it!

When the yogi returns, Gina thanks him for the great service he has done

her, and begs to know if she may buy the crystal.

YOGI: It is not for sale, but if mem-sahib's heart desires it—

GINA: Then I may have it? Oh, thank you! Won't it be wonderful to help others as you have helped me!

ASHLING: Say, how do you do it? Is it this crystal, or hypnotism, or something subconscious? What the devil is it?

YOGI: It is very simple. Learn to aspire in the spirit, but not the flesh. Look into the pure crystal of your own soul, and the great spirits behind the veil shall guard your every step. May the blessings of the everlasting rest upon you! (*Exits.*)

GINA (*slowly repeating*): Learn to aspire in the spirit—that's it! That's it!

PETER (*entering*): Gina!

GINA (*in his arms*): Peter, don't ever, ever leave me!

CURTAIN.



THE POPLAR TREE

UP in the top of the poplar tree,
Which the wind sways to and fro,
Looking across to the far green hills
And the silver river below—
I could stand all day in the poplar tree,
Watching the swallows fly,
Swinging and swaying and dipping down;
It's so "bendy" and green and high!

Through the fields and woods in the valley there,
The talking river flows;
The white road winds up over the hills.
Oh, where do you think it goes?

Up in the top of the poplar tree,
I feel like a ship at sea.
When the wind blows hard, it's a storm come up;
The swallows are sea gulls free.
The good ship plows the ocean trough,
The salt spray dashes high!
Oh, it's only the patter of poplar leaves,
And the whole crew's only I!

HESTER TRUMBULL.

Bachelor Bait

By Jack Rowes

Author of "The Rambles of Rose," "The Jewel Above Price," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY H. D. WILLIAMSON

Two adventuresses try a favorite blackmail scheme. A thrilling story by a clever writer.

I'VE found him, Elise! He's the big chance I've been waiting for! And I'm going to get him, some way, somehow!" Trix's lips tightened into a determined line of scarlet.

"Count on me to the limit if you need help, girlie! What's he like?" Elise's blue eyes questioned Trix with the innocuous baby stare that made her one of the most popular manicurists on Broadway.

"Young enough to have plenty of pep, old enough to know he can't bolt when I show him I've the whip hand. And oh, dearie—he's the handsomest big man creature you ever laid your eyes on!"

"Married?" queried Elise with interest.

"No. Engaged to a society doll! She's in *Vanity Fair* this month. See!" Trix drew out the photographic reproduction and both heads, blond and dark, bent over it.

"Snapshot of Miss Elizabeth Van Ruysdael riding her blue-ribbon winner at Newport," read Elise. "H'm. Can't see much of her under that lid and sloppy riding habit, but I don't like the set of her head. Looks as if she might make trouble if any one ran against her. Is he in love with her or is it money he's after—or position?"

"Not money. He's no fortune hunter, and he has oodles himself. That's why I'm so lucky to have landed this position as his typewriter. The firm's James Wallace & Brother—copper mines—and Jim handles the New

York end while his brother stays out in Butte. Although Jim's only been here a short time, he's already a big success. He's got it in him. What he wants, he gets. He may be in love with this doll, but he's a red-blooded man, and I'm something of a winner myself! I've shown him in a hundred different ways I'm willing to flirt with him, but he's blind—purposely. If I show him any plainer, I'm afraid he'll fire me. I've been in his private office for a month now, but all he cares for is the picture he carries around in the back of his watch! He only sees her week-ends, for her family's still down at Newport, but they write each other nearly every day. I'd like to wring her neck!"

"Trix! You're surely not going to be fool enough to fall in love with him, are you?" Elise looked her horrified consternation.

"Have you ever seen me silly over any man yet?" Trix's laugh was a bit harsh. "Hardly! I'm out for just what he's worth to me in hard, solid cash. Just you watch out! If he doesn't show some human signs of thawing pretty soon, something's going to happen that'll bust up that pretty little romance higher'n an eighty-story skyscraper!"

Elise heaved a sigh of relief. But something akin to fear had sprung to birth in Trix. Adventuresses both, the professions that concealed their depredations they chose as necessitating constant contact with masculine society.

The two girls had early formed a friendship, pooled their interests, and taken a small suite together. Constantly on the lookout for masculine game that would insure her fortune, for the first time in her stormy young life Trix was frightened at the emotions seething

open gaze of his keen blue eyes as they rested on her with his kind, yet impersonal glance.

"I'd give my soul to stir him up!" Her hands unconsciously clenched into small, tight fists as she studied him out of the corners of her eyes from her



Trix rose and went to his side, taking up the envelope addressed to Miss Van Ruysdael in his bold, masculine scrawl.

within her. She wanted the money that Jim Wallace represented, yes; but slowly, inevitably, as she came to know him, she began to realize that she wanted the man himself—wanted him for the warm, bluff heartiness of him, the cheerful tones of his bass voice, the strength of his big, athletic body, the

seat in front of her machine. "Oh, for some way to wake him up, to force him to look at me with the same light that glows in his eyes when he reads her silly letters! How I wish that blue-ribbon horse of hers would break her neck!"

"See that this letter is posted at

once, will you, Miss Watson?" asked Wallace, as his desk telephone tinkled and he took up the receiver to answer the call.

Trix rose and went to his side, taking up the envelope addressed to Miss Van Ruysdael in his bold, masculine scrawl. She slipped out into the hall with it herself, then paused by the public mail chute.

A second, then her hand crept to her pocket. The next moment she was back at her typewriter, the letter safely stowed away until she could get time to steam it and so lift the sealed flap.

Night came before she found the opportunity. At home, alone in her tiny bedroom, she carefully pried it open. What she read sent a hot mist before her eyes. So he loved her—like that! Visions of what life could mean to girls well born, intelligently reared, shielded from the grosser side of life, finding the love that crowns idealism with wholesome reality, flitted through her brain; visions, all, to her—things she had missed, could sense but dimly, yet longed to experience. To be loved like that by such a man! She sank her chin in the cup of her hand, gazing, somber-eyed, at the orange-blue flame of her spirit lamp. If she had lately entertained any hopes of appealing to Wallace's baser nature, to arouse a momentary passion in which to trap him, her idea died. This was love, passion at white heat, the call of the primitive man to the mate nature had fashioned for him.

Slowly, a scarlet spot in her cheeks, she took up the envelope and ignited it in the blaze, then, slipping the folded sheets into a desk drawer, she turned the key. She had burned her bridges.

A month later Wallace was surprised, a trifle chagrined, to receive a week's notice from his typewriter. The girl was quick, competent, agreeable to have about. She would be a serious loss.

"What's wrong?" he asked, glancing

from the correctly worded little note over to the slim black-gowned figure seated at the typewriter. It was really most annoying. The girl was clever and infernally pretty.

She turned and regarded him thoughtfully, then rose and came across, halting just in front of him. He looked at her keenly, noting, not for the first time, what an odd expression lurked at the back of her eyes, an expression that interested him, even while it repelled. A fascinating little witch! She was probably leaving to be married. He hoped the man would appreciate her. A wedding present? His hand strayed to his pocket.

"I'm sorry if you're dissatisfied," he began. "If it's a question of higher wages——"

"It's not that," she answered.

"Then will you tell me why you're leaving us?" he asked.

"Because I'm going to be married." Her words came slowly.

"If that's it, I'm afraid we'll have to try to get on without you." He smiled genially. "That is certainly an unanswerable argument. But I'm sorry you've got to leave us. You wouldn't care to keep on here for a while, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid that would be impossible. But it's not that I want to go. I don't. I like New York, and I'd much rather stay on here, but I promised I'd go back when Calvin sent for me. I didn't expect he'd want to marry me so soon. I came here only a few months ago from my home up State, you see— But I'm bothering you!" she ended in well-simulated embarrassment.

"Not at all!" His tone was heartily encouraging. "On the contrary, I'm much interested. I'm engaged to be married myself, you see. That gives us a bond of sympathy, doesn't it?"

"But you see—I—I'm really not what you might call"—she halted, then

brought it out with an effort—"in love—with the man I'm going to marry."

"That's bad." His brows drew together. "You'd much better stay on here and give him up."

"I'd like to. I love New York, the little I've seen of it. And I've been very happy in my work here, Mr. Wallace. But I can't stay on. This is a man twice my age. He owns the next farm to ours. I've known him always. He's watched me grow up, and he's done a great deal for us all, financially. I've expected to marry him ever since I graduated from school, but first I set my heart on seeing what the city is like before I settled down to spend the rest of my life keeping house for him."

She shuddered a trifle, looking past Wallace out of the window. He stirred uneasily.

"Why, look here," he began, "he can't hold you——"

"But he's been so good to me, to all of us! He even paid for my younger brother's course in a business college. I took a typewriting course when I was in the high school, and I thought I could get work in the city, but I promised him that, after I'd had a year of it here, I'd go back and marry him. That was only right, because what he's done has been on account of his love for me. He's been square with me. It's more than most country girls get, the months I've had here. I was crazy to see something different, so he let me go. Now the time's up, and he's sent for me. So I must go back. That's all."

"You poor little girl!" exclaimed Wallace, quickly sympathetic. "So you call this sort of thing seeing life, do you? Great Scott—you've had a hard struggle just for existence! You're made for better things; one can see that. Why don't you put it up to him squarely? No man wants to force a girl into a loveless marriage. You're making good here. Why not stay on?"

Tell him your employer refuses to let you go!" He smiled reassuringly.

"No. I promised. I've got to go back home. I dare say we'll get on as well as most married couples. I'm young, but time and hard work will soon remedy that! And there isn't a girl in our town who wouldn't think herself lucky to be his wife. So next Saturday will be my last day here, Mr. Wallace."

"I'm sorry." He whirled about in his swivel chair, took up a check book, and hastily filled out a blank. "Here's a bit of a wedding remembrance, Miss Watson. It's just for you, yourself, to get some trifle you'd like personally, with my sincere regrets that we're obliged to lose you."

He offered it to her with genial kindness. The figures danced up at her. It was a check drawn in her name for a hundred dollars, signed with his bold signature. A scarlet spot, which he took for surprised gratitude, burned in either cheek as she raised her brilliant dark eyes.

"Oh!" she breathed. "What a lot of money! If I might only use a little of it just as I'd like and not have to save it all up——"

"That's it. Do exactly as you want with it. Blow it all in on bonbons or theater tickets, if they appeal to you. You've had a hard enough time of it. And will have," he added mentally, but forbore to say it, adding aloud, "That's what it's for—to spend on yourself, for yourself."

"It's more than I've ever seen in all my life! I can never thank you enough. But you're one of the people who seem to understand somehow, without words. You've been most kind, most generous, to me, Mr. Wallace. I shan't waste it in candies, but to go to the theater, to see some of the big shows like the 'Follies' or the Opera! I'd love such memories to take back home with me!"

"Great Scott! Do you mean you



Wallace at the moment was gazing at Trix, wondering why such a peculiar smile was touching her lips.

haven't seen anything of this town since you've been here?"

He paused in sheer wonder. The girl was a radiant, virile young creature, with the love of living vibrating in every nerve. What a life! And what had she to look forward to? The wife of an elderly farmer she did not love, keeping his stuffy old farmhouse, bear-

ing his children, nursing his infirmities while she yet thrilled with the joy of youth, her interests narrowing to the town gossip—a living death to a spirit as ardent as hers! The pity of it! The glance he turned on her was so commiserate, so kindly, that for an instant her heart gave a queer little throb alien to her normal self.

"I've been to the theater just once," she informed him gravely. "I didn't dare go again after that, for fear I'd be tempted to spend all I made that way. And I had to save, you see, to get—a few things—ready for my wedding. I've been to the movies when I've felt so lonely I just had to go out somewhere, but somehow they're not like the theater. One misses the color, the music, the lights, the living people——"

"You poor little half-starved soul!" Wallace broke in rapidly. "Of course you've got to see something of New York life before you go! Take a friend and go somewhere every night you've got left! You'll be here only a week longer?"

She nodded, her lids lowered lest he read the light he had set blazing behind.

"I'll have to go alone, but that'll be all right, won't it?" she asked anxiously. "I haven't made any friends in the city. Oh, just for one evening to see life as it really is here, before I have to go home for the rest of my days! To go to Rector's or Sherry's or any of the great cafés! But that, of course, is impossible!" She paused abruptly. "Thank you again so much, so very much for all your kindness, Mr. Wallace!"

"Why is it impossible?" His gaze swept over her swiftly. A pretty, smart-appearing girl, gowned modestly, but well. No man need be ashamed of such a companion. He made his decision quickly. "I've nothing of importance on for this evening. If you'll let me take you to dinner and a show later, you'll really be doing me a kindness."

"Oh, please—I really didn't intend to say so much! It's simply been boiling up in me ever since I came here, and I suppose your interest sort of knocked the lid off for a moment."

By her flushed face, her eager, shin-

ing eyes, he saw what vistas of delight his invitation had opened before her.

"You'll really disappoint me if you refuse," he said, and with characteristic kindness, he meant it. "I've been so tied down to business lately, I shall look forward to it with as much pleasure as you. I'll call for you at seven, shall we say? And what show would you like to see?"

She clasped her hands in pretty, impulsive anticipation.

"Oh, the 'Follies'!" she breathed. "If we can——"

"We certainly can," he interpolated with emphasis.

"I'd love to see their clothes!" she went on ardently. "I do so love beautiful things! I bought an evening gown for my trousseau"—she flushed—"and I'll wear that, Mr. Wallace. We have grange meetings once a month at home, where we all dress up, so I've bought a few things to take back with me."

His blue eyes twinkled.

"We'll dine at Sherry's and go to Rector's after the show," he said genially. "I've no doubt we'll be the best-looking couple there, Miss Watson! Now let's get off that business letter to my brother in Butte."

Her heart throbbing triumphantly, Trix returned to her typewriter. He was nibbling at her bait; the rest lay in her own dexterous hands. And so well did she manipulate, playing naïve delight, paying him the subtle compliment of innocent gratitude expressed by smiling lips and eyes, that Wallace found himself promising to repeat the experiment in a day or two. During the following week, he took her out on four evenings, enjoying the pleasure she radiated as much as the change of thought in his own habits. He failed to notice that during that week Elizabeth's letters, from her Newport home, were infrequent. He had formed a habit of leaving his own letters on his desk for Miss Watson to mail.

"This is Friday night"—Trix leaned across the small table separating them—"the last evening I shall ever enjoy in New York, for to-morrow night I shall be packing up to leave early Sunday morning for home. My last night here!" She stopped abruptly, her slim fingers nervously playing with her glass.

"Then we must make it a night you'll remember," he promised cheerfully. "I have tickets for Farrar in 'Carmen,' and afterward we'll wind up with a cabaret show, if you like."

"You're too good to me!" she murmured gratefully. "I'll remember these wonderful evenings as long as I live."

"It's a shame you have to go," he answered, "but each one of us has to live his life as he sees it. By the way, that's an unusually pretty gown you're wearing," he added hastily, for the long-lashed eyes were brilliant with inner turbulence.

"My one extravagance." She smiled. "It'll be a year's wonder in our town. It was too good a bargain to pass by, and the woman who sold it to me said green was my color."

He silently agreed. The brilliant Kelly hues brought out the sheen of her dark hair, the radiance of her flushed face, the warm, creamy tints of her slender bare neck and shoulders. A shimmering butterfly evolved from her usual modest chrysalis, the man in him acknowledged her charm.

"An infernally seductive young person," Wallace admitted silently, as he sat beside her in the orchestra at the Metropolitan.

It had been an experiment, this bringing her publicly to the opera, where he knew he would meet friends of his own class, but he had written a careful explanation of the affair to Elizabeth Van Ruysdael, and his free Western spirit was too democratic to bother with outsiders.

Had he known that that letter, with

a bunch of others, lay carefully locked away in a certain small desk in a Harlem flat, and that from a balcony box just above him, Elizabeth Van Ruysdael herself watched every attentive glance and smile he bestowed on the attractive incognita beside him, the game would have ended then and there. But Trix, knowing, did not allow his gaze to wander upward, and the more friends he nodded to in his own vicinity, the deeper glowed her triumph.

It was she who chose the hotel for their supper and, later over a tête-à-tête table in a corner of the Biltmore, Wallace was moved to suggest opening a bottle of champagne to wish her luck. Trix demurred prettily before allowing him to overcome her aversion to temptation. Thus, when Miss Van Ruysdael and her party of six swept into the room, the sight of her lover ardently toasting the fair unknown in Moët et Chandon, sec, greeted her.

Trix, her seat so placed that she could watch the society girl, rose joyously to the situation. She toasted Wallace in the bubbling liquid, keeping his attention constantly focused on herself until, carrying her head high, Elizabeth Van Ruysdael passed out of the supper room. Wallace at the moment was gazing at Trix, wondering why such a peculiar smile was touching her lips. But Trix was mentally repeating the words in Miss Van Ruysdael's last letter, received at his office the previous day and unobtrusively slipped into Trix's pocket before Wallace had arrived:

The Lorings have invited me up to spend the night with them to-morrow. I'm dining with them, and later we'll see "Carmen," afterward going on to the supper dance at the Biltmore. I know you don't care for opera, and their box is already filled, but they want you to join us later at supper and then, my dearest, we'll have some of those heavenly dances we love and do so well together. I'm longing with all my heart to see you again, for the strength of your

arms about me, the touch of your hands. It's such a long time since you've written to me, Jim.

It was then that Trix's lips set in a sinister scarlet line. The end of Miss Van Ruysdael's romance had arrived.

Home from her last hours in Wallace's office, her good-bys gratefully given, Trix flung down the carefully hoarded letters before Elise.

"I've burned all her letters to him—they're worthless—but his answers are all here, and that's what I'm banking on. You're to take them back to him. The rest is up to you."

A lengthy explanation, and Elise, comprehending, nodded her willingness.

"Sure. That's easy. I'll tackle him Monday morning. You ought to get a cool hundred thousand out of this, Trixie!"

Gowned in a smart blue silk, her rôle that of a chic young business woman, Elise saw the office boy disappear into Jim Wallace's private room bearing her card. In one corner she had scribbled neatly, "Counsel for Miss Watson." A moment later, she heard the deep bass rumble described by Trix. The boy, reappearing, motioned her inside.

She paused just within the doorway. Wallace, raising his head from a mass of papers strewn on his desk, looked at her curiously, then indicated a chair. She recognized his close-cropped chestnut hair, his keen blue eyes, his leonine build. He waited for her to speak, quietly taking in the blond hair beneath the smartly turned hat, the innocuous stare of the baby-wide eyes.

"What can I do for you?" he began at length.

Elise cast a glance toward the half-open door. Wallace rose, closed it, and returned to his desk.

"Now, then, what is it?" he questioned crisply. "What does this message mean?" He pointed to the penciled card.

"Miss Watson came to me for advice." Elise's soft voice was velvet smooth. "She has been employed by you as your confidential secretary for some months, I believe?"

Wallace bowed, his eyes on hers.

"She is a young country girl, as you have reason to know, unaccustomed to city men—city morals. This was her first experience. She knew nothing of life, of the double game men frequently play to amuse themselves."

Wallace bent forward suddenly.

"Just what are you driving at?" he demanded.

She lowered her lids modestly.

"You must make what restitution is in your power. She came to you a young, innocent girl. She left you because, after betraying her, you refused to marry her."

She was secretly elated at his stupefaction. It was clearly a knock-out blow. He sat motionless, struck into speechlessness. She went on smoothly before he could get his breath.

"There's no use in attempting to deny it, Mr. Wallace. I have your letters." She held up the dozen odd letters closely written in his bold chirography. "Any one of these letters, with their red-hot protestations of passion, their ardent promises for a happy future together as man and wife, are sufficient basis for a breach-of-promise suit."

"But I'm—I'm——" He searched vainly for words.

"You're engaged. Yes, of course, everybody save this poor girl knew of your engagement to Miss Van Ruysdael. I'm afraid, if she should see these letters, she'd break that engagement unceremoniously. You're a well-known man. The girl who has consulted me—I haven't yet been admitted to the bar, but I'm a law student and I know she has a strong case against you—is alone, friendless, her affections, her whole life, bound up wholly in you. It's no use your denying it. Even your own

friends have seen how devoted you are to her publicly. You've paid her a mere nominal salary as your private typewriter, but I understand you've given her other checks, the last for a hundred dollars, which she has not cashed. And here, in many of your letters, you promise her everything the world can give in your future together. She's got you. Any judge would make you pay the penalty."

"You know, of course, this is all a pack of lies——" he began, but she cut him short.

"The proof is here in your own handwriting, your signed check, the fact that you've frequently been seen in public with her in cafés, theaters, even dance cabarets. Only last Saturday night, you flaunted her at the opera before your friends, then took her to the supper dance at the Biltmore, an indiscretion it may interest you to know Miss Van Ruysdael personally witnessed. These letters, this check, will also doubtless interest her. If we are not mistaken in her character, she will herself be the first one to suggest that you right the wrong you have done this girl by marrying her."

"You'd take these lies to Miss Van Ruysdael?"

Before the fire in his eyes, Elise quailed, although remaining outwardly unruffled.

"It's surely best for her that she be told before this is aired publicly." Her voice was silken. "I came here to-day to tell you frankly, James Wallace, that if you refuse Miss Watson the shelter of your name, she will bring suit for breach of promise. It now lies entirely in your own hands."

"But this is outrageous!"

He checked the words on his lips almost before they were uttered. Outrageous or not, the girl held the whip hand. A scandal involving the newly established Western financier in a vulgar intrigue with his typewriter would

break Elizabeth Van Ruysdael's heart with its sordid sensationalism, even though her lover's innocence was proved. And Elizabeth! Even high faith will break under suspicion. So she had seen them! He leaned over, piercing Elise with his gaze.

"Have you no other course to suggest save—marriage?" he asked bluntly.

"What else is left?" She made a quick gesture to hide her elation. "The girl is penniless, totally unprovided for." She hesitated, watching his hand outstretched toward his check book.

"How much?" he asked again.

"We shall bring suit for two hundred thousand," she said quietly. "The court usually awards about half the damage demanded by the plaintiff. We are willing to settle for that amount out of court."

He laughed outright.

"You've a wrong idea of the man you're hunting, I'm afraid. Wallace & Brother are not multimillionaires. Most of our money interests are tied up in the Western property we're developing. What you're asking is preposterous, founded as it is on the letters which—— How did she get hold of all these letters, anyhow?"

He looked at them curiously. Elise, extracting one, presented it to him. Though dated, it bore no greeting save the "Dearest Girl" with which Wallace usually prefaced his love letters. But the contents, hot with his passion, virile with his tenderness, brought a quick flush to his cheeks. A man writes such intimate messages only to be read by the woman he loves, but here was no indication of the name of the woman who was the object of his affection.

"And these others are like that, only rather more—ardent," said Elise, answering his unspoken question. "In none of them have you called Miss Watson by her first name. But the fact that they are in her possession and the check, which she is holding, will be



"This check is for five thousand dollars. I'll give you another five thousand when you bring me that uncashed check. That's all you'll get. Take it or fight."

sufficient to convince the court, and, incidentally, Miss Van Ruysdael."

She thrilled at the white heat of anger flaming through him, wondering at his control as his fingers tensed, white-knuckled, over the check book. But his voice came level, deadly quiet.

"This is blackmail, Miss Jansen. Also, you're perfectly well aware that your 'client,' if cross-questioned in court under the grilling of my lawyers, would be stripped bare for what she is—a rotten little liar, thief, and black-mailer. If Miss Van Ruysdael could be kept out of this swindle, we'd fight it to a finish and see that you and Miss Watson are put where you should be—behind the bars."

Elise experienced an uncomfortable chill. He looked so leonine, so fierce,

she longed to get clear of his vicinity. But the game was hers. His love disarmed him. Clever little Trixie! The man was an attractive brute. No wonder she had half fallen in love with him. Elise rose haughtily.

"Then we'll have to leave it to the court—and the public—to decide," she began, then flinched as he rose and towered over her.

"Sit down!" he commanded. "We'll settle this thing here—now. I can no more permit a decent woman to be dragged through the mire of a public scandal than I can take those letters out of your hand and throw you bodily out of this office! You needn't be afraid. We Wallaces may not measure up to Eastern standards of culture, but we respect women. Sit here!"

He twirled the chair about in which she had been sitting and she sank into it, heartily wishing Trix had not dragged her into this affair. Reseating himself, Wallace hastily filled out a check. Tearing it off, he held it up in such a way that she could read the figures.

"This is a guarantee you'll get the rest when we can arrange to bank the balance, for, as I've told you, our money is tied up in Butte. It's blackmail of the crudest type, but rather than have Miss Van Ruysdael annoyed, I'm going to buy your silence and the letters. This check is for five thousand dollars. I'll give you another five thousand when you bring me that uncashed check. That's all you'll get. Take it or fight."

He leaned back, holding the check just beyond her reach.

She laughed cynically.

"Thanks, so much! A bad check, at that! Before I could get to the bank, you'd stop payment!"

He smiled, but it was not the genial lighting of features Trix had so graphically described.

"I'll send my office boy over after the cash, if you prefer."

Elise nodded stiffly.

"I certainly do," she asserted.

He touched an electric button, and the office boy, appearing in the door, waited expectantly.

"Take this check and get it cashed at the First National," ordered Wallace. "By the way, how do you want it—in hundreds or larger?"

"Hundreds," she replied brusquely.

"All right. Perhaps I'd best write a line to the cashier, so there will be no mistake."

He dashed off a few words, slipped the paper and check inside an envelope addressed to the head cashier, and passed it to the boy.

"Hurry up, Dave, and keep your hand in your pocket over the bills on

your way back. This lady will wait in the outer office until you return."

He swung about, his shoulders turned, and Elise, her cheeks a deeper pink than the *rouge naturel* she affected, swept outside Wallace's sanctum. Ten thousand dollars! Not much! They were out for a cool fortune, but it could do their case no harm to accept the first five thousand down now and, when Wallace demanded the uncashed check, retain it until he came to their terms. The threat of a visit to Elizabeth Van Ruysdael would be sufficient inducement. He had proved easy, far less difficult than she had feared. Five thousand dollars down! That very night they would move into an expensive apartment hotel! Trix would have to keep up the illusion of the poor country girl until the final reckoning, but she, Elise, would blow in a few hundred on that set of ermine displayed in a Fifth Avenue shop window on which she often fastened her envious gaze.

"Won't I swank around!" she gloated. "Just watch me make a dead set for my silly old gander millionaire who has a manicure every day as an excuse for me to hold his hand, but who's afraid to take me out to dinner for fear wife'll spot him! I'll threaten to call on his wife and tell her he gave me those furs. He'll be glad enough to pay real money down to keep me off from interviewing her, I'll bet!"

Her pleasing reflections vanished as the office boy entered, making straight for Wallace's private office. He reappeared a few moments later, signifying that Elise was to enter. Wallace got up from his seat as the door closed behind her. Her eyes glistened gluttonously as she saw that he held a thick roll of greenbacks.

"The letters, Miss Jansen?" he demanded crisply.

Elise drew them forth from her van-

ity bag, her baby-wide gaze glued to the money.

"Count them," he ordered. "There are twelve, I believe. Hold them up, so that I can see."

She obeyed, her fingers tingling for the feel of the bills.

"That's right. That's all?"

"Every one. We have nothing left but the uncashed check."

"All right. Here's the money."

As the roll passed from his hand to hers, his other hand closed over the letters. Very deliberately he slipped them inside an inner pocket of his coat, then stood silent for an instant, looking down at her, leonine, forbidding.

"When will you be ready to pay the rest for the check?" she asked as she edged toward the door.

"The check? Oh, yes. Of course you realize it really isn't of much importance to us to have that at all, Miss—er—Jansen. If Miss Watson attempts to cash it, she'll find that payment has been stopped, and if she prefers to keep it as a—souvenir of this little affair, shall we say?—it's immaterial to us, for Miss Van Ruysdael, or any one else for that matter, would understand that it represents money due her for extra work done overtime. No, I really think there's no necessity to hurry about it. Still, of course, we may as well have it back in our own hands. I rather fancy Jim would prefer it."

"We? *Jim?*" asked Elise, paling with sudden foreboding.

Wallace's lips relaxed in a sardonic smile.

"Certainly. Is it possible you didn't know? My brother went down to Newport this morning to visit the Van Ruysdaels for a few days. I'm George

Wallace, Jim's brother. We're often mistaken for each other. We're twins."

Though he smiled at her stupefaction, his eyes were hard. Then he turned, his hand on the electric button.

"The boy will see you out," he said briefly, and, reseating himself, plunged into his pile of business papers.

George Wallace! The brother! *Not* Jim! As she taxied back to her suite, the fact that she had been deceived, had been led on to play her game, showing all her cards, to the wrong man, submerged her in shamed self-ridicule. Yet, after all, could she have done much better? She could feel the crinkling five thousand dollars as it reposed beneath her silken stocking. Between them, Trixie and she should be able to force many more thousands out of the firm of Wallace & Brother before they finally parted with that uncashed check. He was bluffing them. But they would show him!

She had worked herself into a white heat of anger when she arrived home. Trix, anxiously waiting, got the whole story from Elise in disjointed sentences, which wound up in the amazing announcement:

"And then when I was going, he up and said he was twins! But I got the money, just the same! Here it is!"

Drawing it from its silken retreat, she thrust the thick roll into Trixie's hands. Trix peeled off the top bill to count the rest, then paused, her face transfixed with horror.

"What is it? Oh, *what is it?*" panted Elise.

"Good God, girlie, he's fooled us!" gasped Trix. "The rest of it's *counterfeit!*"



The Grant Girl

By Elizabeth Irons Folsom

Author of "The Arch Fear," "A Corner of His Heart," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY O. STEWARD IMHOFF

The breath of out-of-doors and a love affair that, with its sudden turns, stirred the heart of a girl to its utmost.

WANASAKA, the half-breed, threw the sail over. The breeze caught it, and at once it was a great swelling wing, impelling, dominating. At its swift command, the little boat tore through the water, rising, falling, like a free, irresponsible thing, bound by no law.

The girl in the stern laughed and clutched the gunwale.

"It catches one all of a sudden, doesn't it, Tommy? A little sickeningly, too."

"I was afraid you mightn't like it."

"Like it? I love it! Don't you worry about me. A whole month, Tommy, to wear a sweater and short skirt!"

She smiled, across a clutter of tent canvas, poles, and supplies, at Thomas St. Aldis Worthington, philosopher, philanthropist, student. He was her brother, too—but he was the other things first.

He was gravely settling his buckets of worms, which he was taking from the "Soo." The north-shore fish liked American worms best; Thomas had found that out by experience. There was nothing concerning it in his books, for he had taken great pains to be sure.

Garda watched him affectionately as he shifted his pails. He would probably not look at her once a day, and when he did, he would be surprised to see her there. Glad enough, too, as he had been when he had found her in the carriage when the journey was be-

gun. He had quite forgotten that she was to go. She had known that he would, and had watched carefully that he did not get away without her. But he had spoken to her twice of his own accord. It was working out finely. Thomas was a dear, she considered, if only he were not so busy thinking all the time.

Even as he answered her smile, his eyes blurred and looked through and beyond her. He adjusted his spectacles, clasped his hands about his fishpoles, and stared out over the water. There was no Lake Superior for him then, Garda knew—no anything but problems involving the abstruse of which his life was made.

She stared, too, and there was the joy of possession within her, for off there, where was a misty land line, lay an island that was to be home for a month. There new experiences, quite unconnected with conventions, were awaiting her. Thomas loved his island and retreated to it each year for a solitary stay. Now she was to share, and the adventure had begun. At the "Soo," they had taken a steamer to Batchawana and then gone into their own craft, with Wanasaka to sail, to pitch the camp, to do the cooking.

The island looked amazingly detached and insecure to her as they rounded their way into the spot that was their harbor. She surveyed it and the interior of her tent rather gravely,

but that night, when she sat on the hillside and dug her heels in for sure anchorage, the spell of it took her.

In the far end of his tent, out of the wind, her brother was making notes by his flash light. She could not hear Wanasaka at his tasks. Clearly there was no one in the world but herself. A yellow ball that was the moon slipped suddenly from the water and hung meaningly close, no longer a flat thing stuck against the sky, but a golden globe, with more purple distance back of it, interminable and grave. Off there in a very far beyond, there was probably still a Broadway that glared, a Fifth Avenue with shop windows. She lifted her chin eagerly. How trivial, how tawdry, how negligible everything but far spaces and a moon that swung thick and real—close in!

The glamour held from day to day. Her tent faced the east, and from her bed of fir boughs, placed with inspired knowledge by Wanasaka—who much preferred to be called John Peter—she saw the first streaks of each new dawn. The world it revealed was as fresh made overnight; nothing had ever been used before, and Garda glowed in harmony. That Thomas might not find her in the way, that he might bring her again, she made as little trouble as possible. She baited her own hook, leaving Wanasaka free to stand by with the net and bring into the boat flashing gleams of color which were the six-pound trout, from their homes in the far-deep crevices.

On days when the wind was right, it was a swift flight to Batchawana for the mail, or that Thomas might make expeditions up little streams that came from Canadian woods. Often Garda fished and sailed and dreamed a whole day through without him.

"I'm tired of fishing, Wanasaka," she called one day. "I'll rest before we go back to the town."

His mutter was understanding, and

Garda lay in the stern, her feet stretched out, her arms lax, her hat tilted over her face. Wanasaka held the sail steady, and the boat rose and fell, speeding lightly into patches of shade, onto glinting streaks of sun shafts. She drowsed with half-shut lids. Wanasaka's hands were on the ropes, and she watched them idly—strong, capable hands. Suddenly she noticed that they were good looking, with the sinewy intelligence some hands have—well, taken care of, too. She looked at him sharply. His hat and kerchief covered his face and throat. Then the wind whipped back his shirt sleeves, and she saw a forearm as white as her own. Instantly she sat up.

"You are not Wanasaka! Who are you?"

It was clearly not the half-breed that the hat and kerchief then disclosed.

"I'm understudy for Wanasaka."

The answer had a flippant tone. Her touch of fear flattened before the rush of her anger.

"How dare you speak to me in that way? How dare you be here?"

"I'm not here for my own pleasure. I'm here that Wanasaka may not lose his very good job. I've done it rather well. You haven't noticed for two days."

"Where is Wanasaka?"

"He's being married."

"Married! When we need him! What for?"

He laughed a little.

"Well, now, do you know, I've often wondered what reason they have?"

She glared at him. He had taken off his hat. There was a line of white across his forehead, but the sun and wind had tanned his face to match that of the half-breed. He had good brown eyes, but they looked amused. She had a flash of recollection that Wanasaka had pulled off her boots the night before, that he had held her with an arm

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Instantly she sat up. "You are not Wanasaka! Who are you?"

about her waist that she might look far down into the water, that he had— Mercy, what had he not done the last two days, this young man with the fine hands and the eyes that laughed?

"Go to Batchawana," she commanded.

Wanasaka's understudy put on his hat and swung the boat around.

Thomas was coming down the shore as they came in.

"You may tell him, if you like," said the man, "and lose Wanasaka his job. He'll be back to-morrow."

She did not reply, but she did not tell Thomas. She had intended to, for this young man who had not quite laughed at her was entitled to no consideration, and Thomas could be very severe when

once his attention was called to the necessity. But she did not tell.

The understudy cooked a good supper. Garda ate sternly. Thomas did not see her during the meal, and she went directly to her tent.

When they were ready to sail away in the morning, she brought out a book and sat under a tree. Her brother did not miss her from her usual place in the stern, but the understudy strode close.

"May I beg your pardon," he said, "for many things?"

She turned a page and did not look up. She was not in the habit of affording amusement to unknown young men.

But when Thomas climbed out of the boat that night, followed by the real Wanasaka, he had his mind fixed stolidly to a material something, for he began almost before reaching her:

"Such a small world, Garda! You'd suppose we were quite alone here, but at Batchawana I ran across Jimmie Levering, freshman at Yale the year I finished. Wanasaka had told him about us. He's in camp a mile up the lake. He came up here alone. His nerves had gone back on him."

"They've probably improved," remarked Garda icily.

"His ailment, as I understood him, was quite serious." Thomas' eyes were growing vague, but he jerked himself back into the world. "I asked him to come over and spend a day with us, and he said he would. Fine young fellow— Eh? What did you say, Garda?"

"I didn't say anything, Tommy."

"Will you remember it, then, and be agreeable to him? Jimmie Levering. Will you remember his name?"

"I think I will," said Garda.

She could trust Tommy not to remember, or to notice that his invitation brought no guest. He did not even

remember when they passed Jimmie Levering's camp a few days later, so close that he was distinguishable at his tent. He waved an arm cheerfully, and Wanasaka responded—no one else.

Walking round and round one's own island, the size of a city block, was not always diverting, and Garda chose to spend an afternoon at the four houses that were Batchawana. She played with the children, talked with two women there, then started to walk up the stretch of rocky shore that trailed between the pine trees and the water.

She had gone far, singing softly, rejoicing in her swift movement, when she was conscious of company. One of the native dogs had joined her and was padding behind. She spoke to him, and he stopped and stared with cold eyes rimmed with red, eyes unresponsive and dull. From somewhere, another just like him slipped into her wake, and another. Almost at once, there were five of them trailing her, tall gaunt beasts with high haunches, with bones sharply visible through harsh coats, with sullen, watchful eyes.

She was not afraid of dogs. She whistled to them, and they slunk back, drawing their heads between their shoulders and flattening their bodies. She put out a hand toward one, and the hair on his back slowly rose. She hesitated, and they drew closer.

As she went on, they circled her, one on each side, two behind, and one just ahead, looking furtively back, walking sidewise that he might keep his cold gaze on her. If she walked quickly, firmly, they slunk. If she hesitated, they drew watchfully closer. She had a feeling that she would not like to slip and fall. She turned to go back, and they drew aside for her and fell into the trail again. They did not growl. She would have liked it better if they had.

She slipped once on the loose stones, recovering herself at once, but she saw

that their eyes were wide and red, their muscles taut, their bodies crouched.

Then she heard a whistle from the water. Jimmie Levering was pulling along in a small boat.

"Pay no attention to them," he called. "Don't notice them. I'll come ashore."

He ran the boat up on the sand. The dogs, with a hardly perceptible motion, slipped away.

Garda's head was whirling.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," she said chokingly. "I'm not afraid of dogs. But these were—uncanny. They seemed to be waiting for something to happen to me." She swallowed hard.

"I dare say they were," remarked Jimmie Levering. "They're more than half wolves, these fellows. Starved, too. Will you have something out of my flask?"

She shook her head.

"Get into my boat, and I'll row you home."

She got in.

"Feel better, do you?" he asked, looking at her curiously, she thought.

She nodded.

"Mean beasts," he went on. Then, suddenly, "I'd much rather be friends with you than not—for a reason. And as for those days that I was Wanasaka, I want to tell you that I got a line on you then—on a woman who was not posing, who was just herself. It was a new experience, I can tell you. I haven't been any too lucky with women."

She felt her face grow warm. There were a few recollections left over from those days when he had been Wanasaka.

"I don't mind being friends." She tried to say it indifferently. "But we'll start from now, not from when you were Wanasaka, if you please."

"That will be hard," he murmured. They were silent then until they

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reached the island, and he helped her out at her landing.

"I'll go and tell your brother where you are. There's nothing to be afraid of here."

Then she was alone with something new to think about, for as he left, he stooped and kissed her on the lips.

Garda sat down on the hillside, and she was still sitting there when Thomas came home. He brought her a note which said:

I couldn't help it. Please forgive me. Will you send me a word by Wanasaka to say that I may come and explain?

She tucked the note in her belt and went to supper with color blazing in her cheeks.

Thomas looked across at her seeingly.

"It's done you good to be here, Garda," he said consideringly. "You're really very good looking. I never noticed it before. I think it's probably the complete change."

"Very likely. Did you have a good day, dear?"

Thomas took another helping of fish. He was inclined to be chatty.

"Jimmie Levering brought me home. He said you musn't go alone on the mainland. Jimmie is a nice boy. I knew the family. He married the pretty Grant girl."

Garda tore the note she was holding twice across and gave it to Wanasaka, who came then for her answer. Thomas was still talking:

"I remember perfectly that Grant girl he married. She was the prettiest girl I ever saw. She had those slanting, long eyes, Garda—nearly Japanese, you know, and purple. It's strange how I remember her. Her mother was French, and she spoke it well; at least, she spoke it a great deal. As I think of it now, it may not have been so well."

Garda got up stiffly.

"I'm trying to recall," Thomas went



"Isn't Mr. Levering here? Did you ask him for supper?"

on musingly, "what the Grant girl did that made such a stir. Either she was nearly drowned or—I think it was nearly drowned. I think Jimmie was the fellow who went out and got her from the lake. Yes, that was it. And she was still pretty when wet. Funny how I remember her, and I haven't thought of her for years, either."

"She must have been very attractive."

"What is it they say about a fine girl? Stunning? Well, she was that."

Garda walked away abruptly. Even Thomas' rare chattiness could not hold her to hear more. Why should she care, she thought fiercely. What was it to her that the Grant girl was pretty

when she was wet? What was it to her that her eyes slanted? Was she, too, to be dominated by pictures of the Grant girl, whose husband had kissed her? She laughed shortly, and then she lay awake through long hours of the night, with her arms over her face, shutting out the deep, far sky.

Thomas was still chatty at breakfast.

"Levering is going inland with me to-day," he said. "Fine fellow. I've remembered. It was his brother who married the Grant girl."

Garda picked up her tin cup and drank her coffee hastily. She choked, said it was very hot, and then drank more of it. She was not to go with them, but she followed Thomas to the boat and potted about

with his paraphernalia.

"Bring Mr. Levering home to supper with you," she said. "Tell—tell him I—I sent for him to come. Will you?"

"Yes, certainly," said Thomas affably. "He's a fine fellow."

Garda took herself to task, after he had gone. She talked aloud to do it:

"Is there any way to make yourself more silly? You've sent for him—for a man who kissed you the first time he had you alone! No, not the first time. There were other days in which he was getting acquainted with you. He said so. What an odd, hideous mistake for Thomas to have made about

the Grant girl! And how like him! You took it very foolishly. You sent him a note torn across, quite as if you had expected something from him."

She would never tell him that she had thought him married. She would be just natural. He liked her to be that.

There was a white blouse in her bag. She put it on and turned the broad collar back over her red sweater. She restrained an impulse to change her boots for some high-heeled ones. The mirror in her tent told her that her hair was shining and bronze in the sun.

Thomas came up alone from the landing. She looked beyond him.

"Isn't Mr. Levering here? Did you ask him for supper?"

Thomas looked startled.

"Why, no. I forgot all about it. But it doesn't make any difference, for he's breaking camp. He leaves for the East to-morrow."

The twilights are long in the North country. There was time to sit interminable hours, it seemed, and clasp and unclasp one's fingers; to decide and redecide and decide all over again.

Then she went down to the water. Wanasaka appeared in the shadows.

"Take me out," she said to him.

He muttered and pointed to the sky line, where hung masses of clouds that boiled and shifted.

"No matter," she said and climbed into the boat.

There was little breeze—not enough to make her forget. She sat in the stern and gripped her knees. Of what narrow margins for good or ill the world was made! How dear old unremembering Tommy had messed things! Gone back to the East!

A swish of wind swept across the water, seized the sail and snapped it, then caught it as in firm hands and bore it down.

Wanasaka was rapidly shifting the ropes, his face toward the coming

storm. Garda looked and saw that there was no line between the sky and the water; they merged into one vast, gray-green wall from the top of which long, dark streamers fled, while at the bottom the wall reached terrifyingly across a narrowing calm.

She sprang toward Wanasaka with a cry.

"Sit down! Confound it! Don't get in the way!"

She sank to the bottom of the boat, her breath caught, her cheeks hot, her eyes on the strong, understanding hands busy with the ropes. The hands were doing what Wanasaka would not have done—they were racing the boat with the storm, instead of making ready to await it safely. The sail must nearly sweep the water. There was no longer any coming cloud; they were a part of it and scudded with it for the cove ahead. Jimmie Levering was holding with all his might, his feet braced.

"Don't be afraid!" he shouted.

The wind whipped the words away. A stronger gust lashed the water over the gunwale. Then it drew in its breath for a second, and in that respite the boat flashed and slid into the shelter of the cove.

"Did you think for a minute I'd let you go so easily?" he said with an embarrassed laugh.

"Why are you masquerading again as Wanasaka?" she asked severely.

"Because it's the only thing I've ever been able to do well."

"Oh, Tommy is always bragging you up to the skies. He's constantly telling how fine you are."

She must say something casual. She must not show that she was glad.

He laughed again.

"Dear old Tommy, he's always wrong in his people and his facts. He's all wrong about me, and I haven't had the heart to mention it. I'm not Jimmie Levering at all. I'm the other one—the brother."

The other one! The brother! Who had married the Grant girl!

Garda sat quite still. He was edging the boat among the rocks, for the waves were beating in. There was a free channel farther back, and he was making for it.

The other brother! She moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. Then she said evenly:

"That's just like Tommy. He knows Mrs. Levering, too."

"Yes," he said shortly, and moved the boat ahead.

Garda watched him. She felt strangely unnatural. All she could really consider was what the Grant girl thought of the back of his straight, bare neck, rising from his supple shoulders. The Grant girl, who was his wife. Not Jimmie Levering's. His.

She pressed her fingers together until they hurt and she lifted and looked at them.

He had reached the little channel and now turned to her.

"We can stay here a bit. The sea goes down quickly when the blow's over."

"I think we must get back."

"What's the hurry? I want to talk to you."

"There's nothing to talk to me about."

"I want to talk about her—Mrs. Levering. I want to talk about that kind of a woman, to such a woman as you."

"Don't!"

His face had flushed and grown stern.

"I've watched you," he said vehemently, "all the time. That was why I kissed you—because you were so wholesome and sweet—so unlike her."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"It couldn't be worse."

She did not reply, and after a minute he went on:

"You think it odd for me to speak about it. But I had to. I've been comparing her with you all the time."

She looked out over the dark water. Already the waves were losing their first spirit. He was so close, when she turned, that she felt her face grow warm; her heart, too, and it had been cold.

He seemed waiting for her to speak.

"I'm sorry," she said.

He did not hear.

"I want to ask you what a woman like you thinks of divorce—ugly word."

"Yes, ugly," she said.

"But must he never have a chance at a real life? Is it too ugly to use in making something lovely?"

He was leaning forward, his clasped hands almost touching her knees.

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because you're a real woman. I knew long ago that I should stand by what you said. Tell me. Is it too ugly to make beauty?"

"No," she said fiercely. "Not too ugly."

Then she put her fingers over her lips and pressed them tight.

He raised his head.

"That is the viewpoint of the right kind of woman. I had to have it. I'll carry that message East with me. Then I want to know something else. Would a real woman—would you, for instance—marry a man who had hated his wife?"

She looked at him gravely.

"I—I—think so," she said.

There was boyishness in his laugh then.

"I had to know what you'd say. From the first, you stood for the right for me. I'll give this in its full value to old Jim."

"Old——" She stared at him.

"Jimmie—whose life has gone to smash."

She put out a hand and touched him with one finger.

"Who—who—married the Grant girl?"

"Why, old Jim!"

Taking Care of Rosie

By Thomas McMorrow

Author of "An Ambassador from Tennessee," "Confession," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY LAURA E. FOSTER

Decidedly refreshing and out of the ordinary is all the work of this new writer. The delightful story of Rosie Vernon has these qualities in a marked degree.

THE springtime heat was slackening trade in Kleingeld's, that huge department store on lower Fifth Avenue, and it was Saturday forenoon. The week-worn saleswomen, entrenched behind banked counters, foiled more easily as time passed the stratagems of the public enemy to engage them in commerce. Energies had to be conserved; the long half holiday and the crescendo of Saturday night were coming.

A few persistent customers lingered in the aisles. A lone gentleman, attired in white flannels and a Panama hat, leaned upon the bronze railing that surrounded the first mezzanine. Below him was the jewelry counter. A young girl stood behind the counter, conversing with a sleek-headed floorwalker.

"Thursday night, then," said the floorwalker. He placed his large, soft hand upon the girl's. "And don't worry about being late last Tuesday, Rosie. I'm very intimate with Mr. Kleingeld, and I'll take care of you."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Dillingham," acknowledged the girl, inclining her golden head.

The floorwalker raised the large, soft incumbrance and strolled away. The gentleman on the mezzanine raised his black eyebrows, widened his near-set, steel-blue eyes, and consideringly caressed his close-clipped graying beard.

The saleswoman raised her hand to the level of her eyes and contemplated a solitaire diamond ring.

"Bert!" she uttered, and frowned.

Up on First Avenue, Bert Gilligan, steam fitter, ceased smiling tenderly at the gas house over the way. He unclasped his hands from behind his curly head, took down his feet from his flat-top desk, and sat up alertly in his grubby shop. He wet a stubby pencil and totted up again the chubby total which had cast him into his daydream.

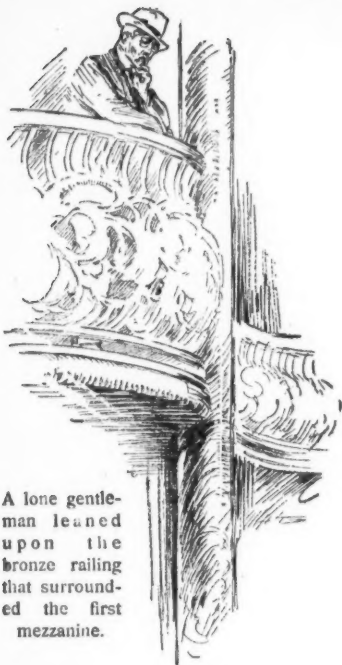
His winter's gains were still fourteen hundred dollars. It was a genteel sufficiency. It could be done at once. He would do it. He reached for the telephone.

Down on lower Fifth Avenue, the operator in Kleingeld's shoved in a plug, helloed, and twisted about in her chair.

"Rosie!" she cried. "It's Bert!"

"Honey," said First Avenue, "it's Bert. How about Coney for this after, dearie? It listens good? I'll meet you outside Moonland, at three. At the gate! And say, honey, I got something very important to ask you—something I want you to do for me right away! Can you guess?"

Golden-haired Rosie returned again to the jewelry counter, the rebellious frown again upon her face. If she saw the hawk-faced man on the mezzanine,



A lone gentleman leaned upon the bronze railing that surrounded the first mezzanine.

she did not accord him recognition. She was absorbed in thought.

One o'clock struck while she was replacing merchandise in the case. Her fingers relaxed as if the blow of the gong had fallen on her knuckles, and the silver-backed brush that she held fell unheeded to the counter.

She fled to the dressing room. When she emerged, a press of girls was pouring from Kleingeld's, and she elbowed her way into the throng. One would have supposed, noting her haste, that something unpleasant would happen to the girl caught after one o'clock in Kleingeld's store.

It was really and truly Saturday afternoon at last! It was also that season when the tyrannous coal man climbs down from his perch and roars gently as any sucking dove that you'd better let him put in seven tons. It was spring!

All New York pulled down its desk, put up its shutters, dropped its bricks, had its hair marcelled, got a close shave with bay rum, and ran to snatch a sandwich. All New York was bound for a frankfurter-shaped piece of real estate lying between Gravesend Bay, Dead Horse Inlet, and the German submarines. The devil would take the hindmost.

New York would say it was going to Coney. On the land map of the city it is called Coney Island.

By three o'clock, three hundred thousand people were promenading Surf Avenue. A thousand were clotted outside the gate to Moonland Park.

Let us single out two—if grammar will permit?

Easily we find Rosie. Her hat is



"Thursday night, then," said the floorwalker. "And don't worry about being late last Tuesday, Rosie."

translucent, and her aureate hair shines through the mesh. She wears a white corduroy skirt, a crisp shirt waist, clocked silk stockings, and glove-fitting patent-leather pumps. She is chic, smart, petite, appetizing, and just now a little peevish.

Beside her stands a bearded gentleman in white flannels and a Panama hat. A light snakewood cane is hooked over his arm by its silver handle. He has added gold-rimmed spectacles to his countenance since we saw him leaning on the railing in Kleingeld's.

And Bert?

Ah, here comes our curly-haired steam fitter, some seven minutes late. He is ruddy-cheeked and broad-shouldered, as befits a youth who has pulled and hauled his way from journeyman's helper to boss of his own shop. He catches sight of his Rosie. His blue eyes beam, and he uncovers gleaming white teeth. He wears glaring yellow shoes and blue serge with the accent on the knees.

"Hello, Rosie!" he shouted.

"Gilbert," said the pretty saleswoman, "I think I've told you fifty times not to yell at me in public, ain't I? And please don't grip my arm like it was a length of three-inch."

"Oh, come, honey," he coaxed, "don't bawl me out to-day. What do you think? I been going over the books, and we can get married at once, Rosie! Isn't that great? What do you say to next month?"

She looked at him.

"Are those your best shoes?" she inquired. "And you know I don't like those horrid wash ties."

"The kicks were the best in Schneider's store," he remonstrated. "Cheap, too. Four dollars they cost me. Ain't they cheap?"

She sucked in a corner of her little red mouth.

"Very. You got good measure, too,

Why didn't you come down to Kleingeld's?"

"I couldn't," he declared. "I done a job of heating in Schneider's, and so I give him the trade. That's business, Rosie."

"It's lucky it wasn't a blacksmith you done the job for, or you'd be wearing horseshoes, I suppose. You had ought to dress more classy, Gilbert."

He put his hand upon her trim waist.

"Forget that 'Gilbert,' Miss Rosie Vernon," he objected. "I thought you'd like them shoes. I bought them just for you. They looked so neat in the window." He stared disgustedly at his feet. "But say, honey, things are fixed so I can take care of you at last. The books show——"

She was not listening. He broke off.

"Who's your friend?"

"Don't stare like that—and do raise your hat when I meet a friend! That's a gentleman at the glove counter down in the store."

"I suppose I got to keep an eye on those young counterjumpers," he grumbled, with a free man's contempt, but only half in jest.

"I advise you to," she assented.

"Maybe you'll learn something. Do you see how refined he escorts his lady friend? Why *don't* you watch other fellows?"

"Rosie," he complained, "you're contrary to-day. What's the matter, dearie? Did I frighten you by talking about getting married right away?"

"Maybe that was it, Bert," she admitted, with a nervous shrug. "It came a bit sudden. Suppose you don't say any more about it to-day and call me up at the store Monday morning."

"Sure thing," he agreed. "Now you wait here, honey, and I'll jump over and grab a couple of tickets."

He pushed his way into the crowd, turned his head once to flash a reassurance, and was swallowed up.

The little saleswoman stepped aside

and genuflected to a mirror in a slot machine. Behind her, a cowboy sitting in saddle at the head of a cohort of mounted Indians raised his hand in signal. The barrier to Moonland lifted. A band perched over the gate burst forth with verve and vim, and the wild horsemen whooped, wheeled, and started into the park.

"Follow on!" bellowed the barker.

Rosie, gazing into the mirror, saw the martial figure of the cowboy passing through its depths. She turned, and saw a river of horses caracoling and tossing their wild manes between her and the steam fitter. At the same moment, the impatient thousand surged toward the turnstiles on either side of the gate.

"Push along there!" exhorted the barker. "Just about to commence!"

Rosie and the gentleman in flannels were pushed along. Soon they were pressed through the turnstiles, which clicked a registry of their entrance into Moonland Park.

An attendant rapped on the glass box before him.

"Ticket, lady!"

"I haven't one," said the rumpled girl. "Did you see a tall gentleman going in ahead? He had my ticket."

"Nix, nix," admonished the sophisticated attendant. "Nothing doing on that! You wait here till your tall gentleman comes back. Ticket, mister!"

"I have no ticket," said the flanneled gentleman, "and I have no intention of buying one. I was pushed in here."

"If you don't buy a ticket, you'll be pushed out again even harder," the official assured him. "I'm charged for everybody passes through that stile."

The thousand passed on in the wake of the whooping aborigines. The attendant dismounted from his stool behind the glass box and stared belligerently at the culprits.

"Ho, Peter!" he shouted to the ticket

seller. "Here's two ain't got no tickets. Pass them out, will you?"

"I can't go out," whimpered the bewildered little saleswoman. "My gentleman friend is inside somewhere, looking for me now!"

"Come on, lady," insisted the attendant. "Step outside, will you?"

"If you will permit me," interposed the flanneled gentleman. "I saw this young lady in a gentleman's company a moment ago. He left her to buy tickets, and it is apparent that he has gone into the park."

He turned to Rosie, divining her difficulty. He raised his hat politely.

"May I buy your ticket, madam? Your escort will repay me."

"It would be awful nice of you," gasped Rosie relievedly. "Bert has my purse, and I haven't a cent. But you must come inside, so Bert can pay you back."

"With pleasure," he said.

He purchased the requisite pasteboards, and Rosie placed her fingers on his arm.

The sophisticated custodian of the glass box looked at their backs with a wise and understanding grin.

"Smooth, that was," he declared to the ticket seller. "Did you see him work it, Peter?"

"This is a very large place, apparently," said the flanneled gentleman, pointing about with his dapper cane. "Have you any precise idea where the young gentleman is to be found? I've never been here before."

"Perhaps he'd be over at the chutes," suggested Rosie.

A mighty splash and a chorus of delighted squeals had come to them from a grove of trees. She trembled sympathetically, and the gentleman patted her little hand.

"Don't be frightened, child," he said. "Is this the way? We'll look there."

Bert was not at the pool at the bottom of the chutes.



"Gilbert, I think I've told you fifty times not to yell at me in public, ain't I? And please don't grip my arm like it was a length of three-inch."

They stood near the band stand and their consulting voices contended with the lilting renditions of forty pieces of brass. The boats that raced down the dripping inclines sprayed them with a fine dew. Rosie was eighteen and holiday bent, and a long gray week would precede the next Saturday afternoon. The magic of the vernal sun transformed the tree overhead into a canopy of green light, and diamond dust was the spray from the slaty pool. She clapped her hands and laughed in answer as a boat beneath them careened to the gunwale and the exhilarated voyagers shouted.

"Do you suppose Bert could be up there where the people are waiting for the boats?" she queried naïvely. "He knows I love to shoot them, and maybe he——"

"We could look," consented the bearded gentleman.

Again he paid for Rosie's ticket, and they rode up on the moving stairway to the platform from which the boats took flight for the pool.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Rosie, raising pathetic gray eyes. "He isn't here, either! We must go down again."

"There seems to be only one way to return," said the gentleman innocently. She clasped her hands.

"Could we really? I'd love to!"

They took places in the boat. Venetian gondoliers trundled the vessel forward and suddenly they were flying.

"Whee-ee!" shrilled Rosie.

And she clutched her escort ecstatically during that ineffable moment when the track fell away in thunder and the pool leaped up to catch them to its bosom. A wall of emerald water drove before them, and the heavy boat skimmed like a swallow.

"Wasn't it *grand*?" she crowed, as they clambered back to the sluggish earth.

"It was a most extraordinary sensa-

tion," he replied, adjusting his unsettled spectacles.

"Perhaps Bert is up there at the scenic railway," urged Rosie greedily. "Don't you think so? Let's hurry!"

He pursed his lips and looked up at the tenuous trestle of threads along which swooped the miniature trains.

"No," he said firmly. "He impressed me as a young man of sober intelligence, and I am sure he hasn't gone up there. We'll look for him in that tea garden, from which we will at least get a view over the park."

They climbed the rustic stair to the airy tea room. They sat on wire-backed chairs, and a wrinkled Chinaman brought them ginger cakes and tea in a painted pot.

He glanced at the solitaire ring as she dropped a lump of sugar in his tiny cup.

"That's Bert's," she smiled.

"And when does it take place?"

"Oh, not for years and years. He wants to marry right away, the foolish boy, but should I give up my freedom and independence and all that? Besides, there's my business career."

"You're in business, child?"

"I have a responsible position at Kleingeld's," she replied with aplomb. "The salary is not immoderate, at present, but I'll work up. I have a good friend in the store who is very intimate with Mr. Kleingeld, too."

"So?"

"Yes," she replied gravely. "He's very friendly with me, and often consults me about the policies of the store. I'm going out to dinner with him Thursday night."

"But—Bert?" suggested the gentleman diffidently.

"Bert wouldn't like it, I know," she confessed, and again the rebellious wrinkle spanned her gray eyes. "He's dreadfully old-fashioned and doesn't understand business at all. Everything

goes by pull nowadays, don't you think?"

The gentleman felt in his jacket pocket.

"I haven't a card," he said, "but the name is Silver. Pardon me. I do believe that pull is a desirable asset nowadays."

"My name is Miss Vernon," she reciprocated. "And Bert's is Gilligan. Mrs. Gilligan! Can you *imagine*? It sounds so frightfully plebeian!"

She drank her tea with satisfaction and gazed down at the tangled leaves.

"I've had lots of chances," she murmured.

"I'm sure of that." He bowed. "And I was admiring the wisdom of your choice."

"Some of the loveliest fellows," she continued, still reading the augury of the leaves. "There's Harold Schnatz, the son of the big brewer, for one. He knows Mr. Kleingeld, too, by the way. Every evening he's outside the store in his big racer, and he's asked me out to dinner. I couldn't think of going, *you* understand, having simply nothing to wear."

She looked up at him and laughed merrily.

"No, I didn't mean just that. Bert is such a dear. I know he couldn't be jealous. I promised him I'd marry him if I didn't make good at Kleingeld's. Don't you think one has a right to live one's own life? I feel I have a duty to myself. Haven't I? I'm sure to get along, because Mr. Dillingham takes such an interest in me, and all the men in the store are so friendly."

Mr. Silver reflected.

"My dear," he said, "have you a father or a mother?"

"No," she replied. "I room with a girl friend up on the Heights."

He patted her hand again abstractedly, and then sat back and glanced at his watch.

"We've definitely lost Bert, I fear,"

he said. "I presume you have no friends on the island? I must ask you to permit me to take you home. Coney Island is a bold, bad place for the unwary and the innocent, and I wouldn't want a daughter of mine to travel about it alone. Besides, I'm responsible for you, as I've mismanaged the business of finding your escort."

"You're very kind," she said gratefully.

"But meanwhile we must eat! I was going to the Raverne over at Sheepshead when I was caught in that mob at the gate. You will have dinner with me?"

A gossamer dusk was falling on Moonland Park, soon to be dissipated by the nightly blaze of electricity. They walked slowly to the entrance, searching among the merrymakers for the missing steam fitter.

Mr. Silver shepherded his pretty charge to a table on the seaward side of the Raverne, the best restaurant between Norton Point and Dead Horse Inlet. He ordered a detailed dinner, and they ate it leisurely, while darkness drifted in over the face of the waters. Miss Rosie Vernon drank a trifling drop of dry Sauterne and chattered; Mr. Silver listened absently, recovering his attention from time to time with an eager smile. When he lighted his postprandial cigar, there were few events in the short and simple annals of Miss Rosie Vernon with which he had not been made acquainted.

"Can we go home by the boat?" she pleaded, as the delicate-handed servitor placed the finger bowls.

Mr. Silver drew on his fragrant Corona and bowed, in the genial laxity of digestion.

"If you wish."

The moon rose out of the mysterious sea as the paddle wheels splashed and the steamer drew away for the prosy island of Manhattan.

"I've had a lovely day," she breathed contentedly.

They were seated upon the upper deck, and the incredible panorama of nocturnal Coney Island was sliding before them. The resort was attaining its maximum of gayety and the tide of travel was running toward its effulgent shores. Few passengers were upon the outbound boat.

"You're very kind to say that," he rejoined. "But I'm sure you are heartbroken for Mr. Bert Gilligan."

"I haven't missed him a teeny bit!" she protested.

He studied her piquant profile in the light from that beautiful shore. She stared out along the moon track. The strains of distant music crept to their ears.

He withdrew the cigar from his lips with a gesture of decision.

"Miss Vernon——" he began. Then he hesitated.

She caught the falter in his tone and hushed her light breath.

"Miss Vernon," he repeated, "we've got to know each other fairly well to-day, and you'll pardon me for being interested in you. May I speak of a matter very personal?"

"You may speak, Mr. Silver," she said evenly.

"It's a delicate matter to broach," he continued, "and I'll be silent when you wish. I am going to speak to you of marriage."

"Marriage, yes?" she echoed receptively.

"After all," he said extenuatingly, "I'm old enough to be your father."

The statement impressed her as maladroit. She started and glanced up at him, wedged against the rail. Then she sank into a reclining position in the canvas chair.

"Miss Vernon," he went on, clearing his throat aggressively, "have you thought about getting married? Have

you thought about it seriously, I mean?"

"I've considered the matter, Mr. Silver," she admitted.

He nodded.

"And you don't think that Bert Gilligan could make you happy? Permit me to say that, having been thirty years in business in the city of New York, I pretend to an ability to read character. I have not had the pleasure of meeting the young man before, but I think that I have gauged him."

He paused to pick his words.

"You've spoken to me of a business career, Miss Vernon," he said. "I don't think, frankly speaking, that your ultimate happiness lies that way. I would like to convince you of the preferability of sharing an honest man's heart and home. Home-making is a woman's true vocation, Miss Vernon."

"Yes, Mr. Silver."

He was not warned by her tone, so intent was he on the business of persuading this child that she should marry Bert Gilligan. Obtusely he persisted in his masculine matchmaking—that fine game which gangs aft agley even in the astute hands of good old women.

"A heart of honest gold, Miss Vernon," he pleaded, "and one whose every beat is for you! I am an old bachelor, my dear, and the joys of domesticity have not been mine, and perhaps I am speaking out of my blissful ignorance when I propose to you——"

"Oh, Mr. Silver!" she exclaimed tremulously. "This is a great surprise to me! Why, I only met you to-day!"

He dropped his cigar with a smothered ejaculation and pushed back his chair.

"I'm not angry, Mr. Silver," she said sweetly. "I think you've spoken something lovely. But I still feel that it would be wrong of me to abandon the business world. You remember what I told you about promising to marry

Bert if I didn't make good at Kleingeld's? At that time——"

"You promised Bert to marry him if you didn't make good at Kleingeld's?" he interrupted sharply.

"Yes," she acknowledged. "I promised him, but at that time of course there was only Bert. Now, I presume to imagine——"

Hastily he threw out a restraining hand.

"Please, Miss Vernon!" he cried afrightedly. "Do not let me hurry you into a decision on whatever it is you have heard me say this evening! We will not mention the subject again, please!"

Miss Rosie Vernon was puzzled by the stilted and disjointed nature of her escort's remarks during the remainder of the voyage. It was such an entrancing night! The passing ships were glowing caravans, languorous breezes blew over the waters, the wake of the paddle wheel was one sustained sigh, and the melodious Italian fingers of the violinist and harpist in the stern were simply plucking at the vibrant strings of her heart. But the callous Mr. Silver did not strike the personal note again.

He accompanied her to the elevated station after landing. She put out her hand in farewell.



"Oh, Mr. Silver!" she exclaimed tremulously. "This is a great surprise to me! Why, I only met you to-day!"

"Will you leave me now, please?" she requested. "Bert will be at my house surely, and I don't want you two to meet, after what has been between you and I. I'll always cherish it as one of the sacredest experiences of my life, and I'll decide very carefully. I'll hear from you again soon?"

"Monday!" he replied heartily. "You'll hear from me before Bert calls up, depend on it! Did I fail to tell you that I am very intimate with Mr. Kleingeld myself? In fact, I expect to meet him on the links to-morrow morning. I feel that it's incumbent on me to continue to take care of you, Miss Ver-

non, and you may be sure Mr. Kleingeld will be interested in your behalf. Good night—and thanks for a very pleasant day!"

She watched his retreating figure.

"Another friend of Mr. Kleingeld's!" she murmured, and ran up the steps.

Thirty-six hours later, the blue pall of workaday Monday morning descended upon the city of New York. The tide of trade flowed into Kleingeld's gigantic department store on lower Fifth Avenue. The holiday-fagged saleswomen took up again their battle with the pitiless public. Down at the jewelry counter, the golden-haired saleswoman nodded brightly to the sleek-headed floorwalker.

A gentleman passed through a private entrance and ascended to the rear of the first mezzanine. He stepped quietly to the bronze railing and looked over at Miss Rosie Vernon. A smile lit his near-set, steel-blue eyes, and he caressed his graying beard.

He walked to Mr. Kleingeld's private office, entered, and seated himself at Mr. Kleingeld's desk. He pushed a button, and a secretary appeared.

"Good morning, Mr. Kleingeld," said the secretary.

"Good morning. Will you ask Mr. Phillips to step in here? Thank you."

"Mr. Phillips," said the proprietor, toying with his gold-rimmed spectacles, "we spoke on Saturday morning of reducing the sales force. You will remember that I did not favor it, as I felt it was our duty to carry our employees over the present slackness. I am of the same opinion still, with one exception. You will pay two weeks' salary in advance to the young lady who is now in charge of the jewelry counter, and let her go. Please inform her of this at once, so that she may make other plans."

"At once, sir," said Phillips.

"And—oh, yes, tell Mr. Dillingham, the floorwalker, to see me before he

leaves to-night. One thing more. I understand that some young reprobates are in the habit of loitering in motor cars around the employees' exit in the evening. Will you oblige me by calling them to the attention of the police?"

Up on First Avenue, Mr. Bert Gilligan, steam fitter, glanced at the clock. He lifted the telephone from its hook. Down on lower Fifth Avenue, Kleingeld's operator shoved in a plug, then twisted about in her chair.

"Rosie!" she cried. "It's Bert!"

Miss Rosie's golden head was bowed in grief, and she was staring at a slip of paper in her lap. A tear was spreading over the writing on the slip. Now she raised her head, sniffed, and walked to the telephone booth.

But when she slid back the door some minutes later, her tears had vanished.

She returned to the jewelry counter, rested her oval chin in the heels of her hands, and suddenly discovered that she was smiling tenderly into the eyes of Mr. Dillingham, the sleek floorwalker.

He laid his hand on hers.

"Don't worry, Rosie," he said in his soft, rich voice. "I've heard about it, and it's all a miserable mistake. I'm going to see Mr. Kleingeld before I leave to-night—he has requested a conference—and I'll take care of you then. You know I'm very intimate with him. I'll have good news for you when we meet at dinner Thursday night."

Quietly she freed her hand. Calmly she looked through him, in one side and out the other and then beyond, as through a soiled glass.

"I don't care for any more dealings with intimate friends of Mr. Kleingeld's," she said. "And I've just made a previous engagement for Thursday evening. If you must see me that night, you could meet me at the rectory of St. Hulda's—though I suppose you'll be too late, as usual. After that, my address will be Mrs. Gilligan, care of Bert Gilligan, First Avenue."

THE WOMAN WITH GOLDEN EYES



LUCY STONE TERRILL

Author of "The Only Man," "The Eternal Masculine," etc.

THERE are women with golden eyes; at least there is *one* woman with golden eyes, for I have seen her. After years of skeptical reading about golden-eyed women, always clothed seductively and of strange allure, I have seen one in the flesh. I discovered her at the library on Fifth Avenue, just across from the ten-cent store.

I went over there yesterday to read up on sirens. I wish now that I'd never had anything to do with sirens, but it's too late to remedy matters. When you're halfway through with a serial—in war time—other incentives than genius urge you to forge ahead, courageously overcoming all obstacles, even sirens. And my first fourteen chapters insist that it is time for my siren to go into action. The path is all prepared. I've endowed her with beauty, and put a perfume in her hair that has vaguely allured my hero's sense of smell; I've had her sing French songs and save a drowning baby. But that is as far as I can go. In spite of my frenzied efforts, the woman sits around mute. The hero is ready and waiting to succumb—only temporarily, of course, and you can't blame him; the poor boy is as much in the dark about sirens and their methods as I am—but it's too much to expect even the un-

initiated to succumb to a siren, however lovely, if she is dumb. Men, though critical of woman's speech as an asset, insist upon sufficient conversational ability to have their virtues extolled.

So I decided to go to the library, where I surrounded myself with magazines that can be depended upon for the very last thing in sirens and settled myself in one of the big chairs by a deep window, from whose vista I could count fifteen "Old Glories" offering their stars and stripes to the May breeze. Outside, in the sunshine, wildly acclaimed automobiles were dashing up and down Fifth Avenue, filled with blue-coated French heroes, or with khaki-clad boys of our own who had already given *their* bond for liberty at the trenches in France. People were cheering constantly; bands played "Over There" and bugles sounded. Birds chattered in the freshly green little trees outside the window, and an occasional pigeon flew down from the column caps of the library to investigate the noisy crowds.

I determinedly turned back to sirens, and had just located an active one of splendid promise in one of the current magazines, when—the woman with golden eyes sat down beside me! Immediately the day took on new interest. I was as excited as the policeman outside who, like a revival speaker, was

exhorting the slow givers to come to the government and accept salvation in the form of a Liberty Bond.

A golden-eyed woman dropped by Heaven into the chair next me! I joggled her magazine with a murmured "Sorry," to induce her to look up again and pardon me. Would her voice be like liquid music, as were the fictional voices that always accompanied golden eyes? She looked up—and her eyes were undoubtedly the color of gold. I never saw anything like them. But she did not speak. Her expression was of sufficient eloquence for me to gather that she considered the joggling of her magazine entirely unnecessary.

She was not a siren; there wasn't the slightest hope of it. Her nose wouldn't permit it. It was a nose rather like my own, a very competent-looking one, but un-sireny. And her chin bespoke an unbroken line of fighting Irish ancestors.

She wore a one-star service pin and a Liberty Bond button and a bright new wedding ring. Somehow her manner seemed to endow these things with such prominence that for some time I wasn't aware that she wore anything else. Then I saw that a black duveteen suit and a brown straw hat, well garlanded with pink roses, completed her apparel. The hat lifted from her face, showing golden hair of exactly the same shade as her eyes, but from underneath the gay fluff over her left ear, there escaped an errant lock that straggled down straight over her ear—and it was gray.

For a whole hour, she absorbed herself in pattern magazines, while I sat weaving siren possibilities about her golden eyes. At five, she consulted a new wrist watch and hastily rose to leave. I followed. I wish I could get over the habit of following people; sometimes they seem to suspect my motives. But the golden-eyed woman didn't even notice my presence.

Crowds were gathering in front of the library to hear the People's Liberty Chorus of five thousand voices that was to sing from the steps of the library at six. Finally the golden-eyed woman discovered me standing beside her on the stone bench just below the left-hand lion in front of the library.

"I think we'll see pretty good from here," she said with a satisfied gasp of accomplishment.

I think we had crowded off at least six less athletic occupants of the stone bench. Reluctantly I was obliged to relinquish another siren attribute. Her voice was not like liquid music—but it was warm with friendliness.

"Yes, if the policemen let us stay," I agreed doubtfully, not quite sure that such alpine sports were allowed on Fifth Avenue.

"Oh, they will. I've stood here a lot of times. I haven't missed a single free Liberty Bond thing they've had. Some's been good, too. Did you hear Farrar?"

I hadn't heard Farrar, but she didn't wait for me to tell her so. It was as if her frigidity of manner in the library had suddenly thawed into a spring freshet of speech. I wondered what had done it, but her next remark told me. She had seen my service pin.

"I see you've got somebody in it, too. My boy's over. Somehow I feel sort of acquainted with every woman that's got somebody in it."

She talked on and on. I tried to insert questions that would switch her off on to her past, but she lived wholly in the present. She had seen all the war movies, and the Blue Devils, and the battle trophies, and fourteen Belgian sufferers; and she had opinions on the Russian situation. She heard from her son almost every week. He had had the mumps and now he had something on one of his toes, but he'd be all right and he wasn't afraid of anything—certainly not the kaiser; and she wished she had money enough to buy a thou-

sand Liberty Bonds. She had two, cash down, and one on the installment plan which she hoped wouldn't be so hard to pay for as the phonograph.

Meanwhile the People's Chorus gathered on the steps, and the crowds surged about us, and I had not made the slightest headway at unraveling her past. Finally, into her flood of conversation as to what should be done with pro-Germans, I flung *this* question:

"Has any one ever told you what wonderful eyes you have?"

I was successful. For an instant, I thought she was contemplating removing me from the bench.

"Humph!" she said. "Well, of all things! Say, do you know what I wish? I wish I'd been born cross-eyed—and—and gray ones at that!"

My eyes are gray, but they are not crossed, so, despite her emphasis, I did not take it that she was intending a personal rebuke. Just then the band began the "Star-Spangled Banner," and I despaired lest its ringing notes should pull her back into the present, but immediately the music stopped, she said abruptly, elbowing the thin man back of us a little farther out of hearing:

"How'd you happen to say that to me?"

"I couldn't help it. I think you have the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. I've thought about them ever since I saw you."

"Humph! Well, you want to thank God you've got ordinary ones! Do I look like a happy woman to you?"

"You certainly do. You know I thought you were just married."

"I am," she said grimly, "just married to my own husband. Now what do you know about that?"

I didn't know anything, but I was vastly interested; and I've found, in this world, that if you really have an honest, sincere interest in other people's affairs, they tell you almost anything.

"How did you think I had a son old enough to fight if I was just married?" she asked.

I calculated recklessly.

"I thought he must be your stepson. I didn't think you *could* have a son that old, and your wedding ring looks new."

"Oh, I'm not so young. I've got another ring twenty-seven years old, but I thought I'd have a new one this time. You *would* look surprised all right if I was to tell you about it. You know what fixed everything up all right? *This war!* Yes, sir—Harry being over there, writing to both of us. But as far as my eyes are concerned, they've got me into every bit of sorrow I ever had in the world—and I've had a lot. Oh, for Heaven's sake—here comes Jim! Right there—see him?"

It was impossible not to see Jim. The biggest man I ever saw was approaching us, a beaming smile on his face.

"Now would you think I'd ever have thought there was any other man in the world but him," she demanded, "no matter what the fools said about my eyes?"

I could agree with her; Jim was certainly as large as most of the men in the world. The crowd parted before him as obediently as the Red Sea before Moses.

He reached the bench and flicked a small man off it as if he had been a fly. Her face brightened in the rays of his huge smile as it might have in the sunshine. Jim was utterly oblivious of any one's presence on the bench but that of the golden-eyed woman, and he saw *her* only partially—only her eyes.

"Golly, I always forget how pretty your eyes *are*, Milly!" he said, in a voice that corresponded with the rest of his big self. "Come on. Charley's got his car over here on Forty-third Street. He's going to take us up the

river for a ride. It'll be right pretty,
with the new leaves and everything."

And as he hurried her away, carefully shielding her from the jostles of the crowd, the Liberty Chorus sang:

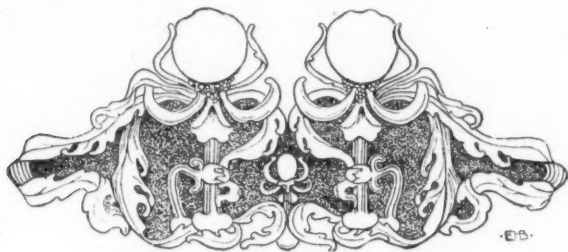
"There's a long, long trail a-winding,
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingales are singing
And a white moon beams.

There's a long, long night of waiting

Until my dreams all come true;

Till the day when I'll be going down
That long, long trail with you."

I went home with a horribly "Lady or the Tiger" feeling. But, in spite of her warning, I went through my fourteen chapters and gave my siren golden eyes.



THE MING TEA SET

IT stands upon my table there
With such a quaint and artless air.
Within its yellow garden close
Twin turquoise ladies, so demure,
Tread purple bridges miniature,
To pluck a golden, glowing rose.

One would not dream, to see them smile,
Those turquoise maids with witching wile,
That some six hundred years have sped
Since first they saw spring's blossoming
When came the dynasty of Ming,
And Kublai Khan's hordes fought and fled.

Hung-Wu, the Son of Heaven, is dead,
His temples dust, his glory fled;
That potter, too, at King-te-chen,
Who wrought with such consummate art
In centuries past each smallest part,
Will paint nor rose nor maid again.

Strange! Kings and dynasties are gone,
And still this fragile thing lives on,
As though Death's self it could defy!
The mind that planned, the hand that wrought
Are naught, aye, even less than naught
To beauty's immortality.

ALINE MICHAELIS.

The Wife of Asa Pincheon

By Anne O'Hagan

Author of "The Lady of Rocca Pirenza," "The Footpath Way," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. C. CASWELL

An absorbing romance of married life—of young love that is sweet and thrilling, and of jealousy and passion that are dangerous.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

Marjorie McDermot, daughter of kindly, easy-going Doctor McDermot of Salesport, and Asa Pincheon, son of a wealthy summer resident of the town, meeting by accident, fall in love at first sight and are married shortly after. In spite of the passionate love between them, there are possibilities of tragedy in their marriage. Marjorie, true daughter of her father, is generous, warm-hearted, full of eager friendliness for all the world; Asa, though fine in many ways, is a true Puritan in others, narrow, self-righteous, swift to condemn and slow to forgive. The first clash between them comes on their honeymoon, when Asa objects to Marjorie's accepting a portrait of her mother from a young artist, Eric Curtis, to whom Marjorie feels almost as close as a sister. Asa is really jealous of Marjorie's affection for Eric, but he puts his objection on the ground that the picture is too valuable a gift for her to accept from a man not related to her. He is too blindly in love, however, to press the issue, and the matter is dropped for the time being.

CHAPTER VII.

ASA looked proudly down at the slim, pliant young figure that walked through the reverberations of the North Station beside him. Six weeks by the shore of the fir-girdled lake in Maine had brought a richer ivory and rose to the satin of her skin; six weeks of marriage, tender, passionate, and gay, had given supernal brilliancy to her eyes; six weeks of freedom from every petty care had miraculously erased from her generous brow the little line that life under the family roof-tree in Salesport had been engraving there. Her husband's heart swelled as he looked down upon her. Phrases of Oriental splendor, such as Solomon used in the great love song, traveled through his mind and were not forbidden. The Puritan in him was briefly under the domination of the lover; the modern innerly discarded the clipped speech of his times.

"Oh, Asa, stop him—the porter, I mean—before he gets out to the taxi stand! I want to telephone home. I want——"

"Home?" Asa smiled teasingly. "You're forgetting where home is, aren't you, Mrs. Pincheon?"

"Oh, well, you know what I mean. Catch him, Asa, do! Where are we going to stop? If I telephone now, they could get the four-fifty-three in, and could have dinner with us. Mother, anyway. There's no counting on dad. And Frances. Oh, it was dreadful of me not to plan the thing properly! I've been a selfish pig. If that's the way happiness is going to affect me!"

She raised a humorously rueful face toward her husband's. He had halted the porter, laden with their bags, and that functionary stood by, with an air of being willing to forego haste only on condition that his self-denial should be properly acknowledged in his tip.

**The first installment of this story appeared in the September number of SMITH'S.*

"We aren't going to a hotel to-night, dearest."

Marjorie's face fell at the words.

"To your mother's?" she faltered.

"No, not to mother's. I haven't been any more dutiful than you. I haven't let her know that we're coming to-day, either. And I"—he emphasized the pronoun—"I am not even going to call her up and beg her to dine with us. Strange as it may seem to you, volatile and pleasure-loving young woman, I can still stand the thought of a tête-à-tête dinner with my wife. Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself, Mrs. Pincheon?"

She sent him a little smile, dark and warm and sweet. But she said:

"Oh, Asa, it's so long since they've seen me!"

"Has it seemed so long?"

"Don't tease. And mayn't I have them—as many of them as can come? I don't want them to think that just because I'm happy—so happy, Asa!—I forget or love them any less."

"We'll have them to-morrow night," said Asa decisively. "For to-night, I have a sentimental fancy for our having our first dinner in our own home alone together."

"Our own home! What do you mean, Asa Pincheon?"

He had begun to pilot her once more toward the street and cab stands, but at the astonishing news contained in his ultimatum about dinner, she stopped short again.

"A surprise for you, madam." He beamed upon her. Her face fell. "What? Don't you like the surprise?"

"Of course I do!" Marjorie rallied her smiles. "Only, for a quarter of a second—just for a quarter of a second, Asa—I felt disappointed at being done out of the fun of house hunting. You see, I've lived in one old shack my entire life. But this—this is loads better! When did you decide upon it and where is it?"

Leading her toward the taxi and putting her into it, he told her. It was, he was sure, the exact place in all Boston where she would have chosen to live. There were western-giving windows that commanded the Charles and the sunset; both the dining room and the library boasted them. There was a great curved seat in the library just beneath the semicircular window. Did she know how she would look curled up there, reading a little, dreaming much, watching the river and the sky, waiting for him to come to her? Did she know how she was going to look, a vivid rose of color and light and life, against the brown of the window seat?

"Brown?"

Marjorie's voice struck sharply across his rhapsody. They were rolling along in the taxi now, and he, who had once set great store by form and had frowned upon the infinite vulgarity of those who embrace in public, had infolded her with a possessive arm, though the Asa Pincheon he had once been mechanically lowered the side curtains.

"Yes. Brown. And you shall shine against it like the wild rose you are against the brown of an old wall or country cottage. Marjorie, tell me you love me!"

He pressed his lips to the sweetness of her neck, of her smoky-black hair. She withdrew herself from his arm and leaned backward that she might meet his eyes. Her own were hurt.

"Love you?" she said mechanically. "Of course I love you. Haven't I been telling you so for six weeks in sixty different kinds of language? Ah, haven't I been telling you so ever since you came riding up to your mother's house, a knight in armor on a shining steed, a knight in armor out to rescue luckless ladies? Love you, goose!" She laughed. Her own words, the recollection they had conjured up, banished for a second the new look that

he had never seen before in her eyes. It came, however, back again. "But—about our house, Asa—"

"Vaulting ambition! A house for a young married couple? Count yourself lucky to find a fair-sized apartment yours, madam!"

"Well, about our new home. I don't care whether it's a house or a flat or a tenement or a shanty. But—"

"Add, 'So long as we are together in it, Asa,'" he commanded, half laughing.

"I won't add anything so frightfully obvious. But—is it all furnished, Asa?"

"Come and see for yourself," said Asa in triumphant tones, as the cab drew up before one of those stone mansions that give the sensations of palace-dwelling royalty to democratic hordes.

There was a uniformed boy waiting to open the cab door, and there was another behind him to take the luggage. Some one grandly paid the taxi driver, and Asa and his bride walked into the house where they were to try together the Great Experiment.

It was no hall of commonplace, meretricious splendor that met Marjorie's eyes. There was no glitter of bronze and gold, no overemphasized whiteness of marble. The walls were of dully polished brown wood, delicately carved at top and base and along the divisions of the panels. There was a fireplace



Leading her toward the taxi and putting her into it, he told her. It was, he was sure, the exact place in all Boston where she would have chosen to live.

of yellowish Sienna marble, and a fire glowed within it. The big terra-cotta slabs that made the floor were almost entirely concealed by rugs of plain, dull-blue velvet. There was a settle or two, looking as if it had been transported bodily from some medieval Italian church; there was a table that might have come from an old convent refectory; there were two or three great jars of greenery.

"Rather neat, what?" said Asa, as they walked toward the elevators at the rear of the discreet magnificence.

"Beautiful," said Marjorie dutifully with her lips. But her eyes were still troubled.

They whirled aloft. They stepped

out upon more deep-piled velvet carpeting. Asa rang at a dull-polished brown door. Marjorie, through a hall window, caught a glimpse of the Charles, its bridges dimmed to faërie arches by a golden autumn mist. Beyond it Cambridge lay, like a city in a dream. It was beautiful, and the faint look of growing hostility vanished from her eyes.

Asa's old servant admitted them, a supple, smiling mulatto who had done for him ever since he had left the maternal dwelling. Tolty, dignity and pleasure struggling against each other, bowed impressively low to Marjorie and then showed a wonderful expanse of white teeth in an African grin. She smiled a kindly response, heard what he was telling Asa about the installation of a cook, and then she passed from the small vestibule into the larger hall, with rooms opening away from it on each side. They were all perfect. Nothing was wanting. Fires burned, flowers breathed their perfume upon the air, a grandfather clock tick-tocked in the corner as if it had stood there ever since it had left its maker's hands a century and a half before. Asa, triumphing in the completeness of his surprise and the exquisite art with which it had been executed, led her from room to room. She followed him like a person in a dream; she said: "Lovely!" or, "Perfect!" from time to time, but she said it as one who speaks by rote. By and by they paused at a door. He stooped and kissed her ardently.

"This, my own pearl," he whispered, "is the shell where you shall sleep! This, my own lovely rose, is the calyx that shall hold you!"

He opened the door of Marjorie's bedroom. It was ivory and rose. And, seeing it, as perfect a room as ever left a decorator's hands, Marjorie slammed the door behind her and threw herself into the rose-covered chair beside the fireplace and began to sob. The horri-

fied Asa caught her hands away from her face. He begged to know what had happened. He called her a hundred loving names that he had never dreamed were included in his vocabulary.

"What is it? What is it?" he kept asking her.

And by and by her sobs became strangled laughter, and she waved him away from her with weak wrists.

"Go away—please, please go away! Oh, I *am* ashamed! But—Asa, who—ever did this place for you? Or did you do it yourself before we were married?"

"Do it myself? Of course not! I'm not a decorator. Evadne Lawrence has been doing it while we were at Ossamug. Don't you like it, Marjorie? Or what is the matter?"

Still struggling with her hysterical tendencies, she wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Of course it's perfect, Asa. But—but I'm such an old-fashioned person, I had expected to do my own house myself."

"Oh, nonsense! In another minute, you'll be telling me that you expect to cook your own dinners yourself, or to make your own shoes yourself, or to spin your own flax. You live in an age of specialization, Mrs. Pincheon, ma'am, and you can't disport yourself all over the lot as your grandmother did."

Marjorie sat suddenly upright and looked at him.

"That's all very pretty," she said, "but what is my specialty in this highly specialized age of yours?"

He knelt on the floor beside her and encircled her with his arms.

"Do I have to tell you?" he asked her, low, ardent, possessive. "Your speciality is to love me."

Marjorie unfastened the fingers laced behind her and rose. She crossed the room before she spoke. When she did speak, she was looking out of the win-

dow at the row of staid houses opposite, and her eyes were hidden.

"Is that specialty of mine going to be my whole occupation?" She played with the curtain cord. "Somehow, love has always seemed to me rather the—the air in which one lives, the air one breathes in, or gives out, or—or something," her sentence ended rather lamely. "I never thought of it as a business."

"Oh," said Asa airily, "there'll be other little odd jobs for you, too. You'll be invited to serve on fifty committees—don't make faces, my child; they're not becoming—and you'll find yourself with a rather large visiting list on your hands. And there'll be dinners and dances, and all the men furiously jealous of me because I alone——"

He moved toward the window as he spoke. Marjorie moved away from it. He checked his steps abruptly. Then he began in a different tone:

"What is the matter, Marjorie? I don't understand you. You seem to be—you seem to be," he repeated the words as if to emphasize the unbelievable, "you seem to be trying to get away from me!"

Marjorie stopped in her restless movement about the room. She turned toward him a face half horrified, half appealing.

"Asa! What a dreadful thing to say!"

She went toward him, her arms extended. They clung together, and, with the palpitant warmth and sweetness of her body against him, he forgot the second of numb, bewildered pain, just beginning, that had preceded this moment. But again it was Marjorie who escaped the caress first.

She looked about the perfect room, and very deliberately she elevated her pretty little nose.

"You may say what you please about this being the age of specialists, Asa," she informed him. "And of course I

know that your cousin, Miss Lawrence—— She is your cousin, isn't she?"

"A distant one," Asa answered.

"I know she is a marvel of a decorator, and all that, but as a matter of fact, I always loathed ivory enamel and I hate this rose color. It's so—it's so deliberate." She fished the word triumphantly out of the depths of her consciousness. "Deliberate—that's what it is. Tawdry old Venuses—you know, the overgrown fat kind that sing in Wagner operas—they always inhabit a pink Venusberg just about this shade. I always meant to have my bedroom mahogany and gay chintzes, with perfectly impossible birds flying through them. She's a wonderful specialist, I dare say," she ended with a comical sort of scorn, "but she didn't specialize in my tastes. So there!"

"I'm sorry the room doesn't suit you. Of course it can be changed. I myself think it very pretty. It doesn't suggest a theatrical Venusberg to me at all." He was obviously offended. "If there are any other rooms you don't care for, of course they must be fitted up to suit you. I only thought—I only thought——"

"Oh, I'm a spoiled pig! You ought to make me sleep on the straw in the barn! Please, Asa"—she was at his side again, her hands upon his shoulders, her upturned face wooing him to forgive her unappreciativeness—"please, Asa, forgive me! I'm a horrid little beast. It's only because I was disappointed a little bit. I'd meant to make the house furnishing a sort of picnic for us all—that is, for you and me and mother. I think mother would almost have died of bliss, to have the money to furnish a whole house decently at one time. You understand, don't you?"

He had not learned the art of unbending easily, but it was not within the power of mortal man to withstand Mar-

gorie's face, sweet and wistful, with tears sparkling under the brightness of her eyes. He melted, smiled, kissed her, and said:

"Of course I understand. I'll tell you what to do. Take some money and your mother, and go off on a regular debauch of house furnishing for your father's place. Wouldn't that answer?"

"It would be sweet," said Marjorie regretfully, "but I don't believe—well, I don't believe dad would want to take a present like that from you. Perhaps, though"—she hurried on, as the look of one misprized began to darken Asa's features—"for her Christmas present, we might do over her room—mother's. That would satisfy my yearnings without sacrificing dad's pride."

So the first threatened conjugal squall blew off into fair weather. Nevertheless, as Marjorie dressed for that first dinner in their own home—dressing very carefully in a frock her husband particularly admired, that she might make up to him in every way for the ingratitude and unappreciativeness which she felt black upon her soul—undefined, almost formless little misgivings flitted through her mind. She loved Asa, gladly, whole-heartedly, utterly, but must life be one continuous caress, one continuous asseveration of love? Unanalytical as she was, she groped in her mind for the distinction between amorosness and love, even passionate love.

She knew that he loved her; she was entirely convinced of it. Then why had not his intuition told him that she wanted to play, as it were, with her own first house, not have it turned over to her complete in every detail? And was there any disloyalty to him in the feeling that tugged at her heartstrings, pulling her toward the telephone, that she might speak to those dear ones in the shabby old house down there at Salesport? No. She knew that she loved them the better because of the

new richness of life that her new love had brought to her. But she knew, too, that somehow, inexplicably, all those old loves, all those dear old loyalties, fed the new flame that burned, high and white and beautiful, in her heart.

She did not define her feelings even as clearly as this to herself. There was only a vague trouble in her breast. She loved the whole world better because of Asa, and she loved Asa better because of all the rest of the world. That, for her, was the end of the matter; by and by it must be so for Asa, too! So the voice that vibrated along the wire until it reached the ears of Mollie McDermot, down in Salesport, was a happy one. She had disposed of her problem to her own satisfaction.

In reply to her mother's surprised questions, she told where she was living, when she had gotten back, and made excuses for not having notified her family of her intentions.

She heard her mother tell some one to make a note of the address she gave, but she did not know then that it was to Eric Curtis Mrs. McDermot spoke. That knowledge did not come until late in the evening.

They dined together, she and Asa, as beautifully and as happily as two young people in a play or an illustration of a high-life honeymoon. The little mutual resentments of their home-coming were forgotten, dissolved like mist in sunshine. They were almost as gay as they had been in their balsamic solitude by the lake, when their guides had left them alone in the cabin. Marjorie, who did nothing half-heartedly, admired Evadne Lawrence's taste and skill as exhibited in the dining room. She laughed at Asa's jokes—finding them, indeed, very amusing. She was delighted with the dinner and with Tolty's service. She congratulated him upon his prowess in unearthing so good a cook. It developed that the cook was

a connection of Tolty's, in what degree of consanguinity he failed to mention. He had always been hoping, he said, that Mr. Asa would get married, in order to introduce this paragon of a kinswoman into his kitchen.

And after the easy hour at the table, there was an easy hour before the fire in the library, an hour punctuated with trips to the wonderful window and lookings out upon the myriad-lighted river and spangled bridges. A fall breeze, springing up at sunset, had blown away all the mist of the

done, despite the perfectness of Evadne Lawrence. There must be a piano; where should it be put? The boxes of wedding presents were still stored down at Salesport; they would require sorting and placing.

"And discarding," said Asa firmly.



"Isn't it angelic of Eric," she cried, after her husband had somewhat coldly greeted the guest, "to have come right away to see us?"

afternoon, and the river and the city beyond it were aglitter. Marjorie's raptures over her new dwelling were now all that the most exacting discoverer of such a dwelling could demand. Asa was satisfied.

With his arm about her shoulders, they wandered through the apartment. After all, there were things still to be

"We're not going to spoil this place, that Evadne has made so altogether what it should be, merely to avoid hurting the feelings of Aunt Amanda, who gave us the impossible lamp, or Cousin Obediah, of the awful chocolate set. We aren't going to spoil the place for any one, not for our nearest and dearest, are we, sweetheart?"

Marjorie merely smiled in reply. Deeply rooted in her was the conviction that no mere piece of artistry was worth the hurt of any outgiving human soul. But it wasn't necessary to talk about that with Asa. Of course, when the time for decision came, he would be as tender-hearted as she toward all the impossible gifts, and would give them honored places until, by and by, time would either dispose of them or mysteriously transmute their impossibility into something comfortable, cherishable.

"A gentleman to see you, ma'am," Tolty broke in upon the current of her thoughts.

Marjorie glanced in surprise toward Asa as she took the card from the salver.

"Why, who can it be, already?" she murmured, and then, reading the name, she gave a little cry of joy.

"Asa! It's Eric!"

She dashed from the room, eager, glad. Asa followed slowly, all the deep satisfaction of his evening gone as utterly as the wine from a shattered glass. Damn the fellow's intrusiveness! How dared he break in upon this wonderful first evening of theirs? Where had he learned their address? And Marjorie——

He did not finish the mental criticism of Marjorie as he had intended to. It required much stronger mental language than he had been employing to do justice to what he felt when he saw her, her face gloriously flushed, her eyes shining, both her hands in both of Eric's. She might almost as well kiss the fellow as greet him with this abandon of joy!

"Isn't it angelic of Eric," she cried, after her husband had somewhat coldly greeted the guest, "to have come right away to see us? He was down home when I telephoned mother. Oh, Eric, exactly how does she look? Has she missed me terribly?"

"No," answered Eric lightly. "I've made a point of seeing her myself every few days. No, she hasn't missed you unduly, and she's looking as fit as a fiddle. She took a rest after the wedding, and let Frances and Trudy Crothers do the housekeeping—had her breakfast in bed every morning for two weeks, and her most serious labor was to go out with your father on his rounds. My word—this is some place you have here!"

"We think we shall be very comfortable here," said Asa coolly, emphasizing his sense of detachment from their guest and of indifference to his praise.

They had walked back into the library. Marjorie was already displaying the view from the window with an air of ancient proprietorship.

"It's a peach," Eric declared warmly, both to Asa's temperate praise of the apartment and to Marjorie's view. "It makes my place look like the traditional thirty cents."

"Have you a place in town?" asked Asa resentfully.

"Yes. Over on Copley Square. You know the kind of thing—studio with a bath and kitchenette behind a screen. We must have a party there right away. What night can you come?" He turned to Marjorie.

She stole a glance at the impassive profile of her husband. Why, she wondered, was it necessary for Asa to look like the lord high executioner merely because Eric suggested a harmless, and, as one really thought of it, very agreeable little merrymaking. Still, it would probably be better not to rush headlong into indiscriminate plans with Eric until various little things were straightened out; as, for example, the matter of her mother's portrait. They hadn't spoken of that since the day they had set off upon their honeymoon trip; indeed, they'd been too happy to think about it again. But now it seemed hanging in the very air before them.

"We'll come soon," she said sweetly. "We can't begin to make dates until we're unpacked and settled, and until you've all been to see us. Mother's coming up to dinner to-morrow night, and so are Frances and Trudy Crothers. By the way, Eric, why doesn't Trudy Crothers go home? Is she going to live with us forever? I mean with the family. Of course she seems a dear girl—but it must be four months, or five, since she came."

"Oh, didn't you know? She's got a job in Salesport—Latin in Miss Baird's school. She's boarding with your people, though—a bona-fide, pay boarder, not a sponge like me. And if you should ask me whether Dan, junior, thinks pretty well of Trudy, I should be obliged to tell you——"

"Eric!" Marjorie ran at him as he lounged before the fire and rolled himself a cigarette. She shook him. "How can you stand there suggesting such exciting things in such an offhand manner? Are they engaged? I should be perfectly furious if Dan McDermot ever got engaged to any one without talking it over with me first!"

"Strong sense of justice, hasn't she, Pincheon?" Eric put the question laughingly to Asa. "Because, of course—oh, yes, of course!—she talked everything over with Dan before becoming engaged herself. Well, my child"—he turned again toward Marjorie, finding in Mr. Pincheon's statuesque features no invitation to continue his pleasant-ries—"they haven't taken me into their confidence. It's only observation—a tolerably well-developed observation, though I do say it who shouldn't—that makes me pretty certain as to what is going on.

"Where"—he changed the subject abruptly as he looked round the room—"where are you going to hang the picture of your mother? I think that space"—he indicated a wall above the low bookcase that filled one side of the

room—"would be a dandy place. Awfully good light. And then, of course, you'll like to have it in here, where you'll spend as much time as you'll spend in all the rest of the apartment put together."

Marjorie stole a glance at Asa. His eyes were full upon her. Hers besought him for favor, for concession, for graciousness. His bade her remember his wishes.

"I think that would be a very good place, Eric," she answered, a little nervously. "Don't you, Asa?"

"Isn't it rather unfair to temporize with Mr. Curtis, my dear?" he asked coldly. "You see, Curtis"—he turned toward Eric—"I don't think that we should allow you to give us that portrait. It's too valuable."

"I can afford it," said Eric, suddenly cool, poised, alert for a fencing bout. "Though it's awfully good of you to concern yourself about that. The time may come when it will be worth a little money, but that time is not yet. And even if it were marketable to-day at the price of a Rembrandt, I should consider that I could perfectly well afford to give it to Marjorie McDermot. I've had more than money from the McDermots."

"I understand your feelings perfectly," declared Asa, suave and obstinate. "But, you see, the point is you haven't had more than money from me. I really can't feel justified——"

"The picture was my wedding present to Marjorie," interrupted Eric coolly. "Somehow I don't expect that the rules of the countinghouse are going to begin to govern my relation with her. Of course, if she doesn't want it——" He threw his cigarette into the fire with a light gesture, as if he would as easily throw the picture in also.

"But I do! I do want it!" declared Marjorie, flamingly rebellious against injustice, against ungraciousness. "I

want it very much! Asa isn't going to be stuffy about it, are you, Asa?"

Asa's mood, as he met his wife's eyes across the fireplace, was dark. Was it possible that so few hours in civilization had brought them to an impasse? Why had it been necessary for her to have all these belongings—that shiftless family, this thoroughly detrimental friend? Why could she not be content to let the world narrow down until there was room in it for only himself and her? Would it be utterly churlish to hold out against the pleading of her lovely eyes, against the croon in her soft voice? He wanted to eliminate this man from their lives; he wanted to eliminate all men from their lives—their real lives. Men, to her, must be merely the supers in the play, not players of real parts. Her father, whom she adored so extravagantly, that awkward brother Dan, all the boys who had known her in the free-and-easy school democracy of Salesport—he wanted to blot them all out. But especially he wanted to blot out this man, this charming, handsome, gifted cosmopolite. He himself, Asa, would never be cosmopolitan, though he should sail the seven seas and live in all the countries under the sun his whole life long. To the end, he would remain Asa Pincheon, Puritan gentleman, of Boston. He was glad that it was so. He had no taste for chameleons, borrowing a hue from every new light that shone upon them. Yet before one of the tribe he felt awkward, at a loss. Should he make an issue of the thing now, and by that act of ungraciousness, rid their existence of this trifler? Then, again, he met Marjorie's eyes.

"Naturally Marjorie wants her mother's picture," he concluded slowly. "And of course, as you suggest, the portrait's a gift to her and not to me. But I wish you'd at least let me pay for the frame. Framing, they tell me, is frightfully expensive."

"Why on earth are we talking about my wedding present to Marjorie like a pair of hucksters, Pincheon?" demanded Eric. "Of course you can't pay for the frame! You may get a new one if you don't like that one, but I'm pretty sure you'll never get one better. Can't we drop the subject of dollars and cents?"

"Yes," echoed Marjorie, "can't we? It seems to me that I haven't heard so much talk about money since the day before that wretched note was due at the bank in Salesport, and you, Asa, came down out of a rich heaven, as it were, to save all our lives."

For the sake of that day and the smile she sent across the room in recalling it, Asa forgave her that she sided with his opponent in the controversy. But that forgiveness did not include any pardon for Eric's "pair of hucksters." He would find some way of ridding Marjorie and himself of the fellow's society. He couldn't bear to deny her the bauble that she wanted—her mother's picture on her first night in their new home. He felt very magnanimous as he surrendered. He hoped Marjorie was impressed by his magnanimity. As for Eric, it really didn't matter what he thought.

What Eric was thinking was slangily, vulgarly, this: "How could she have fallen for a stiff like that? Poor Marjorie! And she looks as satisfied as if she'd captured the king of the world!"

He sighed a little as he walked toward the studio in Copley Square. She had become very beautiful, his old playmate. He was not so dull as to ascribe that new, radiant efflorescence of hers to her new perfection of garb and setting.

"How they blossom the first few weeks of marriage—all the virtuous little girls!" he commented. "And then how they fall off! Poor little Marjy, I wonder if she will, by and by? Not through anxiety over her lord's unfaith-

fulness, if I'm any judge of character. What was that I was reading the other day about a wife being the vice of the virtuous American husband? Darned clever! Darned true! But satiety, weariness, use—they'll take the gloss from her beauty that marriage and satisfaction have put upon it. Only fresh loves can impart fresh bloom. Heigh-ho! But dear little bread-and-butter Marjorie will never learn that great lesson of the emotions. And as for Asa—ugh!"

Across the night, the chimes from some church steeple sounded eleven.

"Only eleven! The admirable Pincheon had given me the impression that it was well past midnight. I've time for a look-in upon Médore, after all."

He turned his course and bent his steps toward the theater where the renowned Madame Médore was delighting critics and losing money for her manager by her artistic presentation of modern French drama.

CHAPTER VIII.

Asa's heart had made the journey home before the train had more than pulled out of the Buffalo station. He had been away for two weeks, his longest absence during the six months of his marriage. Whenever he had been obliged to leave Marjorie before, a night or two had been the limit of their separation. Often she had gone with him on little trips. He was inclined to think, now, that those little jaunts had afforded him the most exquisite hours of his married life. They had been alone together, as they had been upon that idyllic honeymoon. While he attended to business, he had the deep, restful satisfaction of knowing that she was engaged in the wifely act of waiting for his return, of killing time until he should return.

At home, in Boston, it had been quite different. There were so many to in-

trude upon their happiness! He wished he had induced her to come upon this trip; he would have had two weeks of her. But she had been hopelessly involved in social affairs. There had been rehearsals for Evadne Lawrence's annual show for the crippled children's hospital; there had been luncheons; there had been dinners at which, he knew, his unavoidable absence would be quickly made good by efficient hostesses, and Marjorie would sparkle and shine and enjoy pseudo-grass-widowhood. She had unbounded capacity for enjoyment. Then, of course, there had been sittings for her portrait by Curtis, who had, by some coercion of personality, made himself the season's link between society and the artistic crowd. Oh, there had been a hundred reasons why Marjorie could not absent herself from home for a single day!

Opening his bag, he read again the telegraphed night letter from her which had been his first summons to consciousness that morning. "Thirty-first anniversary—did you remember it?" it began. They had had the still infatuated young couples' habit of weekly celebrations of their wedding. Had he remembered, indeed! He read on. It was a gay, foolish, inconsequent message, and it had warmed his heart, especially the final sentence: "You will be home for dinner, and there shall be nobody here."

That was a reference to the dinner on the night he had left home. Her family had been there. When he had telephoned her from his offices in the middle of the afternoon that he was obliged to go to Chicago that night, he had, at first, suggested her coming with him, only to be confronted by a list reeled from her engagement calendar. Then he had asked gloomily if they had any unbreakable engagement for that evening. They had—the McDermots were coming to dine, the whole lot of them. He didn't know four per-



She had captured the hearts
of the little Italians and Slavs.

sons whom he cared less to see. She had refused to put them off—that is, she had practically refused it. For when her voice had dropped and had grown bewildered and hurt, he could not insist.

So his last evening at home had been spent in the uncongenial society of his in-laws. He had tried to be decent to them, of course, but it had been an effort. They grated on him, irritated him, aroused some devil of opposition in him. Oh, well, he knew well enough

what it was! If they had only been the family of some one else, he could have admired them, could have enjoyed their quality. The thing he hated, he knew, was that he had to share Marjorie with them, that Marjorie loved them, Marjorie, whose every heartbeat should have been for him alone, as his were for her. What did he care for his mother?

Well, thank God, they wouldn't be there to-night! He hoped his wife had played about with them to the very limit

of her desire during his absence, and that she would be content to forego their society for at least a month now.

Out of his bag he fished the little thirty-first-wedding-anniversary present he had bought her. It was a charming thing, a bowl of delicate outlines, silver without, a shimmering, sea-shell-pink enamel within. A single white rose, a single mauve orchid, should float within it when she first saw it. He would place it upon the top of the little mahogany desk in her bedroom.

He smiled, remembering that mahogany desk. It had been good fun refitting the bedroom to Marjorie's own desires—such good fun that he half wished he had not let Evadne Lawrence do them out of furnishing the whole place. Never mind! In three or four years they would take a permanent country place—please Heaven there would be the final reason for a permanent country place within three or four years!—and they could have great sport in fixing that to suit them. By and by, they would need a house in town, too. Evadne should be but an agent in these transactions. He would employ her to carry out Marjorie's ideas, not to impose her own upon Marjorie.

Evadne, by the way, did not like Marjorie. He was sure of it, though he didn't pretend to be one of those intuitive chaps, and although she had been very kind to the newcomer into the sacred circles of her native city. Marjorie, he imagined, had proved something of a surprise to her sponsor. Was the young wife's success altogether a pride and a pleasure to Miss Lawrence? He smiled. Perhaps. But it was a surprise, also. Well, for that matter it had been a surprise to him as well. He hadn't expected society to be as discerning as himself. Her beauty, of course, only the blind could fail to acknowledge, but her charm—the infection of her gayety, of her generosity

—it was astonishing that that had actually "gotten across."

He would have been just as well satisfied, he told himself, if she hadn't leaped into popularity, into fashion. For, if she had not been snatched up into the round in which he had left her, she would not now be sitting for her portrait to Curtis. It was Evadne who had suggested it. Evadne had found Eric useful in color suggestions and in arranging settings for the Comedy Club, of which she was a leader. Evadne had taken him up, and so had a dozen other women who were glad to number a fresh bachelor of amusing conversational gifts and a seasoned flirtatiousness upon their lists.

It had all been very pleasant and easy for the young painter—but unremunerative. That little fact didn't seem to bother Eric, to be sure. His flowers made prompt duty calls for him at the houses where he dined, and Madame Médore, as it was thrillingly known, never lacked the rose or the trinket or the parchment-bound volume or the drive that she desired, because of his lack of funds. But Evadne had been practical.

"Commission him to paint Marjorie's portrait while she's the rage," she had said. "Next year won't do. There'll be somebody else, then, who will have her own painter to advance. But if Marjorie sits to him, half a dozen other women will, and he'll be made. Oh, of course I know you aren't interested in making him. But I am. Do it to please Marjorie—and me. You owe me something, Asa!"

She had looked at him meaningly as she had said that. He had remembered the day he had held her hand beside the sea and had hated holding it. Of course she couldn't be referring to that discreetly buried episode—he doubted if she remembered it. Probably dozens of men had essayed love-making with Evadne, and his momentary insanity

had not dwelt in her mind. However, he didn't ask her what she meant. He said that if Marjorie wanted to have her portrait done by Curtis—

"But of course she wants it!" Evadne had cried.

And apparently she knew more about it than he did, for Marjorie, when he had inquired, had raised starry, adoring eyes to him and had answered:

"Asa, how wonderful you are! How wonderful! Yes, of course I'll sit for him!"

In the face of that belief in his generosity, how could he let her know that he had been stabbed by the most wretched jealousy on each occasion of a sitting? Her mother had always come up from Salesport and gone to the studio with the girl—he had insisted on that. It had been a piece of propriety that had made Marjorie at first angry and then merry.

"Eric! Fancy Eric!" she had cried, full of laughter when her indignation had abated.

But she had submitted. It seemed that she was actually glad to see her mother; they made a picnic of the affair.

How she loved them all! How she spilled the bubbling wine of her affection wherever she turned! If only she would but keep it tightly stoppered in some wonderful jeweled flagon, for him! It was his right.

He tried to read a little from a work on railroading, but he could not keep his attention focused upon his book. His imagination was at home, with her. Every detail of their meeting he rehearsed. Every look, every smile, he envisioned. How her heart would flutter beneath his hand when they should sit together to-night upon the library window seat, and look out at the river and the lights! He would stop her mouth with kisses when she essayed to tell him of all her activities during the days he had not shared with her. By

and by he would see her standing in her room, glimpsing, for the first time, the bowl with the floating flower in it. He knew exactly how she would turn rapturously toward him; she loved beauty and she had a childish passion for "surprises." And then, afterward, the deep night would unfold them, and he would possess her utterly. He closed his eyes and grew pale, anticipating that moment.

And yet, he told himself, when the second had passed, he was not a sensualist. It was not pleasure he desired—it was Marjorie. He had lived in cleanliness and self-control all his days. No obscene beast had lurked within him, all one ravening appetite. If he was now a uxorious husband, a demanding lover, it was no grossness that made him so. It was the deep yearning to be assured of his wife's utter love for him. It was only in her final surrender to him that he felt her wholly, only his. If the world were but rid of intruders, of the endless army of those who shared Marjorie with him, as it seemed to him, he could, he thought, forego the final rapture of existence; or, rather, he could experience it as fully when he turned his eyes toward her, touched a fold of her dress, as he experienced it now in their closest, most sacred embrace. It was those others, the tribe of them, upon whom her generosity and gayety expended themselves, that gave to the one thing they did not share so great a place in his thoughts of her.

And there were men—and many, many women!—who were obliged to share even that ultimate moment with others! There were unfaithful wives, who went carelessly, indifferently, one might almost say, from the embraces of a husband to those of a lover, of another lover! There were men by the thousand—Faugh! It sickened him to think of them! How could such creatures bear their lives, themselves? To share Marjorie in mere everyday

fashion with the world which had, he admitted, its legitimate claim to a part in her—to share her with her people, with her friends, with the very children with whom she danced and played once a week at some dingy settlement—all this was to him an offense that became almost a torture. But to think of those others!

He remembered the first—and the last—time he had seen her at that settlement. His own mother had been responsible for that association! He had rather welcomed it. It would take some of her time, some of her interest, some of her overflowing affection, away from those whom he regarded as his rivals. But when he had gone down there one afternoon to fetch her home, and had found that already, in two or three meetings, she had captured the hearts of the little Italians and Slavs and that they clung to her with dirty fingers and danced about her on toes that protruded from their poor shoes, he had felt defrauded once again. It was his love that she was wasting upon them! It was the love he wanted, jealously, for himself and for the children that they would have by and by. Why had he allowed her to take up with the work?

But he had not been able to explain to her what he felt. He dared not. The saner portion of his brain, not yet a prey to the obsession of complete possession, warned him not to let her see deeply into his feelings. So he contented himself with warnings to her "not to wear herself out" upon the work.

At any rate, it was better, he supposed, that she should be giving herself—her beauty, her charm, that aroma of freshness and gladness that accompanied her as its perfume accompanies a flower—to those eager children than that she should be giving it to the men who were beginning to drop in to her tea table—or to Eric Curtis!

How horrible a real jealousy would be! How devastating, if once a name were attached to the feeling of unrest, of disquiet!

Had she kissed Eric that night when he had watched her through the window—the night of the first day he had ever seen her? Had that rush of glad steps, that outstretching of eager hands, culminated in a caress? He had a vision of the two glad young faces close to each other. *Damn* Curtis! Why had he not put an end to that acquaintance, as he had intended? Why had miserable self-pride kept him from telling her plainly that he was jealous of the fellow, had been jealous of him ever since that night when he had watched him swinging along the street, whistling his Spanish tune? It was true. He had been jealous. Why had he been ashamed to admit it, and to make the demands which such an admission would explain and enforce?

He was not usually given to so much concentrated thought upon himself and his emotions. But then usually he saw Marjorie each day, lived with her, knew what she was doing, saying, wearing, thinking. Usually he had, each day, a thousand little tendernesses from her to keep him sane and happy. Now he had been away from her for two weeks. And to-day he was not only away from her, but he was idle, on a train. He would never go away from her again! Hereafter, she must go with him, whatever her silly engagements.

Meantime, he would read. He dragged the book once more from his valise and set himself doggedly at it. At first the effort was wearisome. He would read a page to discover that he had not captured a word of its meanings, had seen nothing but the curve of Marjorie's cheek, a little escaping curl at the back of her neck. But he went back. Word for word he forced himself to make sense of the lines of print. At the end of an hour, he had subdued

his imagination, gained control of himself. At the end of the second, he was deep in his work.

He lunched, smoked, talked with casual travelers in the smoker. The lovesick, longing mood was gone; he was a man among men. By and by he went back to his reading.

The day was well along; the train thundered into the station at Springfield. Newsboys came through, crying late editions of New York and Boston papers. Asa put up his railroading volume and bought a Boston paper. He ran over the headlines on the front page. Nothing very exciting. He scanned some steamship announcements. He must see soon about reservations for the six weeks abroad he had been promising himself and Marjorie—another blessed six weeks with no intrusions upon their happy, wandering privacy. He turned to an inner page.

"Jeweler Sues Prize-winning Painter," he read. In the next collocation of black-typed letters, he saw Eric Curtis' name. He scowled and folded the sheet to read the column.

Two days before, it appeared, the judges at the Spring Academy Exhibition in New York had awarded to Mr. Eric Curtis, "the popular Boston artist and society man"—Asa's lips tightened—the Holton prize of a thousand dollars for his "Flower Market at the Spanish Stairs." And the announcement of the award had been swiftly followed in Boston by notice of a suit instituted against Mr. Curtis by a well-known firm of jewelers for five hundred and twenty-seven dollars' worth of goods, delivered largely to Madame Médore.

It made a column of quite spicy reading. Mr. Curtis' social activities in Boston were detailed, his popularity descanted upon, the list was cited of the ladies upon whose portraits he was now engaged. The name of Mrs. Asa Pincheon, junior, led all the rest. Mr.

Curtis, the report said, was a connection of Mrs. Pincheon's family.

Disgust and relief were blent in Asa's feeling. At last he had his decent excuse for forbidding any further acquaintance with the fellow. He had small use for the sort of men who ran into debt. Hang it, a gentleman should meet his obligations! Of course there were a good many *soi-disant* gentlemen who didn't. But for his part, he instinctively disliked them. He hoped that he was not a Pharisee, but he had not found it difficult to keep out of debt, to be temperate in his use of alcohol, to remain uncharmed by other men's wives and by the preying sisterhood who were wives of no men. He supposed he was about like the average fellow in vulnerability to temptation and in native powers of resistance. And he had resisted. Therefore it was plain that they could all resist, if they wanted to! They could all lead such lives that they need not fear to meet their tailors' eyes upon the streets, and could bring to their wives what he had brought to Marjorie—a love that was undefiled. It was because they had a natural taste, a desire, for falling, that they fell.

To think that that irresponsible old duffer down at Salesport, Marjorie's father, had actually allowed this fellow who was now smearing good, clean paper with his miserable affairs—had actually allowed Eric Curtis the run of the house! With young girls in it, too!

Of course it had been a close-knit family life that they had led down there; he must be just enough to admit that. Mollie McDermot's wise, kind, tired eyes were, he felt, keen to mark dangers threatening her young. Still, it had been a risk, and that it had not eventuated badly was due to no prudence of the doctor's, of so much was sure! Not that he held Marjorie to have escaped entirely scathless; there was her name in that column of stuff, half



Asa strove, not too successfully, to play the cordial, congratulatory elder brother.

magistrate's court news, half loathsome innuendo. Well, it would soon be arranged! The break had had to come some time; he was glad that it was coming now, definitely, sharply. Poor Marjorie! It would be a hurt to her kind heart, this knowledge of Eric delivered like a blow between the eyes. Madame Médore, in sooth!

CHAPTER IX.

The late dinner had been perfection. Marjorie's greeting had been more than

perfect. She had clung to him as he to her, losing, in one long embrace, the unendurable pang of the two weeks' separation. There had been tears in her eyes, tears in her voice, as she rushed into his arms, murmuring: "It has been so long, Asa, so long! Never, never shall I let you leave me again!" And then, after the intensity of their joy had simmered down to placid contentment, the dinner of Toly's admirable cook in the kitchen—she had proved to be Toly's wife in the final

questioning—had been a work of art in which were delicately compounded a regard for healthy appetite, for an educated palate, and for the blissful oblivion of two young persons to what they were eating.

In the library, after dinner, Marjorie brought him a light for his cigar, as he lounged, pashalike, upon the window seat and gave his eyes the pleasure of following her graceful, swift motions. And as she slowly blew out the blue spurt of flame, after she had ignited the weed, he deferred for another ten minutes the subject of Eric Curtis and Madame Médore. It would be a pity to spoil a satisfactory moment with that affair.

"Asa, I've got a blow—a little bit of a blow—for us," Marjorie confided, throwing the match into the fireplace.

"What is it, kitten?"

"We've got to see some one—some two—this evening. Only for a few minutes, though."

"Oh, damn! I beg your pardon, Marjorie. But why do we have to see people to-night?"

"It's only Dan and Trudy Crothers." Marjorie's wistful voice pleaded with him to be kind, to be sympathetic. And behind the light veil of apology and regret in her eyes danced excitement and gladness. "They're engaged, Asa!"

"But why do we have to see them to-night? Why not to-morrow night, or last night?"

"To-morrow is too late. Dan is going out West. I'll tell you all about that by and by. And last night—Why, Asa, I wanted you to be at home to share it with me!"

"Share it with you?" Asa was genuinely nonplused.

"Yes. The gladness. Oh, Asa, isn't it wonderful? Dan—I can remember when he was born! It's almost the farthest-back thing I do remember! I can remember him as such a funny little boy—fat legs and chunky little

body and such a serious face! I used to have to take him out to walk, and I wasn't always sweet about it, either. And now—to think that it's happened to him as it happened to us, to find this—this—wonder, this light, this gladness! Asa, I'm so happy!"

He drew her toward him. She was appealing in her tender sisterliness, absurd as she was! He kissed her.

"Lucky Baby Dan!" he commented lightly. And then he went on: "But you can't really approve of this engagement, Marjy! What have they to marry upon? It's tying a stone about your brother's neck when he should be most unhampered. And Trudy Crothers—What is that girl's right name, by the way? 'Trudy' is an absurdity."

"Her name is Gertrude," answered Marjorie.

"Well, you don't suppose that Trudy Crothers can inspire any such feeling as you can inspire, do you? Or that Dan can love her as I love you, my darling? Why transfer to them the emotions that only you and I know?"

"Silly!" scoffed Marjorie. "Why, I should be the unhappiest woman in the world if I thought that only you and I could have happiness like ours! It would be—don't you see?—like sitting down to one of Liza's dinners and knowing that the rest of the world was hungry! And as for Dan—you don't know how Dan feels things!"

"Well," answered Asa, unconvinced, even a little annoyed, "it's their affair, not ours. What time are they coming?"

Tolty answered the question on the instant, coming in with a broad grin and the announcement:

"Mr. McDermot, ma'am, an' Miss—his young lady, ma'am. I didn't get the name."

Then followed twenty minutes in which Asa strove, not too successfully, to play the cordial, congratulatory elder brother to the radiant pair. But

through all the question and answer, through all the jest and the prophecy, protest stirred within him. Marjorie was too fond of these people; she made them as much a part of her life as she made him, her husband. She hovered over Dan. She fluttered, all sisterliness, all gladness, about Trudy Crothers, that square-built, plain, wholesome-looking girl whose face was, indeed, to-night irradiated by a light from within, but who could never be esteemed a beauty to inspire a great passion! The old feeling that somehow he was defrauded by what she lavished upon others was insistent, almost noisy, within him.

And yet how lovely was the light in her dark eyes, as they shone upon her brother and his sweetheart, over the edge of the glass of champagne Asa had insisted upon their drinking in celebration of the engagement!

The sense of being subtly cheated remained with him after he had finally seen the intruders to the elevator. It destroyed the delight that had enveloped him earlier in the evening. It made it easier to refer to Eric Curtis.

"By the way, Marjy," he began, rather elaborately indifferent, "I suppose you read of that pretty mess Curtis has been getting himself into?"

"Who? Eric? No! I haven't seen anything except that he won the Holton prize the other day. Is there some controversy about that?"

"Not exactly. It was in to-day's papers. I'm surprised you didn't see it."

"I forgot to read the papers," Marjorie confessed.

"Well, it's a messy sort of thing. He hasn't been paying his bills——"

"Poor Eric!"

"Nonsense! Irresponsible Eric—shameless Eric, if you will—but not 'poor Eric.' He hasn't been paying them. And they've been largely contracted, it seems, for the sake of this

Madame Médore, who's been playing a lot of degenerate French stuff——"

"Oh, Asa, how can you! It wasn't degenerate—not much of it, anyway."

"I consider myself a better judge of degeneracy than you, Marjorie," he stated sharply. "Many of the plays in her repertory would never have been tolerated in English. People who wanted to pose as knowing French and being cultured gave her what vogue she had. However, I don't want to discuss art with you at this time of night. I only want to tell you that Curtis, whom I have never liked or trusted, is involved with this semi-disreputable woman, and that he's being sued for the cost of the trinkets he's been sending her. He's not a fit person to remain on your visiting list. I shall tell him that sittings for your portrait must cease——"

"Asa!"

He had not known that her eyes could blaze. In all the months during which they had lived together, many as were the moods he had seen upon her face, he had never seen this look of sheer indignation. He was startled by it. He was wounded to the depths of his heart that she, his wife, could regard him with such eyes for the sake of another man. All the old, vague resentment of her early relation with Curtis sprang into sudden, furious life, as a strong wind fans the fires beneath embers into flame.

"I shall tell him," he repeated icily, "that the sittings for your portrait must cease. I shall, of course"—he was magnificently disdainful—"pay him his commission, since I ordered——"

"You seem to think," she cried, "that your wretched money can pay for anything!"

She was angry, almost uncontrolled in her anger.

"Apparently Curtis will find plenty of use for it," he retorted. "Ladies like Madame Médore are expensive——"

"Oh! Madame Médore!" She dismissed the actress as a trifle.

"What do you mean by that tone?"

"I mean—what has she to do with it? I mean what has she to do with Eric and you, or Eric and me? He's always been running around after some girl or other, some woman or other——"

"And you, a pure-minded girl, a pure-minded wife, make light of such things?"

"I've been sorry, in a way, of course. But—don't you see?—it was all part of Eric, and we took Eric as he was——"

"For God's sake, stop calling his name!" cried Asa.

Marjorie looked at him. She kept silent for a few minutes, summoning back her calmness, her love, her reason. What had happened to her in those bewildering moments when she had been possessed of sheer rage against her husband, against her dear love? Of course she had always known that Asa disapproved of the light-hearted McDermot way of taking things as they were, people as they were, and not applying the inch rule of righteousness to them all. Why should it now seem to her so unendurable? Was she going to take a leaf out of his detestable book, and apply her own standard to him, criticize him for not being other than he was? She must get hold of herself, of her true self—of his true self, as well. They understood each other, loved each other——

"I don't know exactly what to call him," she answered, after the little self-collecting pause. "You wouldn't want me to begin with 'Mr. Curtis,' after all these years? But—don't say anything angry, Asa, please!" She warded off an interruption. "I only wanted to make you understand how I felt, how we all feel at home——"

"You always call that place from which I rescued you 'home,' Marjorie!" He seized upon a small offense. He must have an outlet for his indignation, for his sense of having been outrageously used.

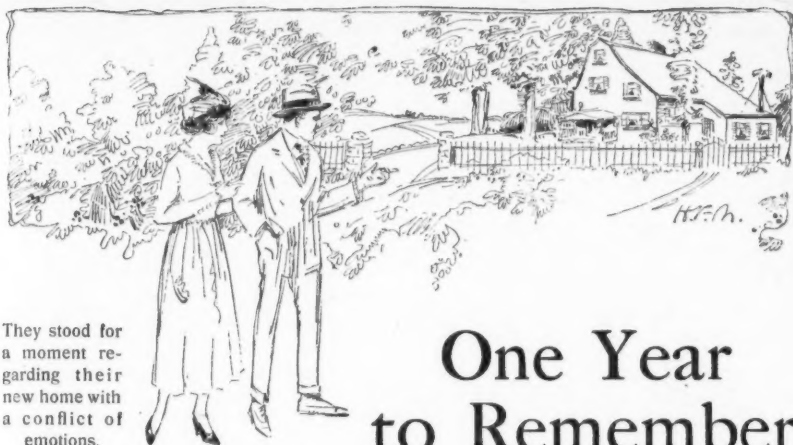
A pallor overspread Marjorie's face. Even her lips grew white with upsurging anger.

"The place from which you rescued me," she returned, speaking slowly, in a low, vibrant voice, "was my home much longer than these rooms, which your friend, your relative, fitted up for you. It was a home where we never thought that money was a plaster for all sores. It was a home where we were glad to share all that we had of goods and of affection with all whom we let enter it. It was a home, Asa Pincheon, where I never heard it suggested that when a friend was in trouble, it was an excellent time to drop him!"

She marched, straight and defiant, from the room. He did not follow her. He feared that, if he did, he would lay rough hands upon her, would shake her until there fell from her some expression of regret for the altogether abominable way in which she dared to treat him and his love and his gifts.

By and by he went to his own room. It adjoined hers, and for the first time since their home-coming, the door between the two was closed. He wondered if it were locked, but he would not test it to see. It was for her to open it—to open it and to come to him abjectly. He lay rigid all night waiting for her repentant appearance, her surrender. But there was no movement of the great glass knob, no turning of the silvered hinges.

Very well! The issue had been raised. His way or hers—it must be decided once for all. He would not yield to her, would not yield to overmastering loneliness and desire for her.



They stood for a moment regarding their new home with a conflict of emotions.

One Year to Remember

By Ruth Herrick Myers

Author of "Columbia," "Alma Mater," etc.

A STORM of protests from both sides of the house had risen when they married.

"Consider the high cost of living, alone!" gesticulated Jean's mother.

"To be met by Richard's salary!" declaimed Jean's father.

"In such uncertain times as these!" fumed Richard's father.

"And still paying your uncle for your college loan!" reminded Richard's mother.

"It's a terrible risk!" predicted Jean's married sister.

"Go ahead! Just try it once!" dared Richard's married brother.

Which they did.

Probably the dilapidated playhouse of a cottage out toward the edge of town, which they had a chance to rent for twenty dollars a month, was the main factor in clinching their determination. The old skinflint of a landlord promised to do as little as he possibly could toward fixing the place up, but,

generously figuring that it would all go toward increasing the value of his property, gave them *carte blanche* to add any improvements of their own that they desired. So, hiding their quaverings each from the other, they signed their lease for a year, ordered two wedding rings, two cans of paint, two brushes, a regiment of nails, tacks, soaps, scouring powders, and a step-ladder, and went home to announce the date of their marriage to their respective and skeptical families.

On that mellow September afternoon upon which they returned from the briefest of week-end honeymoons, they stood for a moment regarding their new home, before they entered it, with a conflict of emotions. A most natural pride they most rightly took in its neat, altered appearance. The lame leg of the porch had been jacked up, straightening the floor, the missing spokes of the railing replaced, and a concrete lower step substituted for the decayed

wooden one which had hitherto invited a guest either to hurdle it or to run the chances of breaking his neck. A new coat of yellow paint had cheered up the aged exterior vastly, so that under the two oak trees whose leaves were now a rich, autumnal brown, and with its background of a wooded ridge over which a golden sun was just dropping, the cottage presented, after all, rather a fitting and youthful appearance.

The new joy of ownership surged up within them both as they went in and closed the door upon the world. Long, horizontal lines of late sunlight shot in slantwise through the soft curtains across the new rugs and across the huge Indian rug in front of the fireplace which had been Jean's for years and was a touch needed to blend the old with the new, to soften the transition from the old order, which was changing, yielding place to the new and untried. It sent a welcome glow, too, over the faces of the friendly books which Richard had placed in their familiar sequence upon the shelves he had made and stained for them, each side of the fireplace. Down from the walls smiled old pictures and some new acquaintances, many of them wedding gifts, to be learned and loved as the years rolled on. It smelled fresh within from the new paint and stain and paper, experimental, deliciously young and uninhabited before; and mingling with the freshness of it was the redolent, memory-stirring pungency of cedar from the linens and cushion covers and hangings which had lain, awaiting this day, in Jean's wedding chest. It was theirs, all theirs, hitherto partly hers, partly his, now theirs together, the old and the new, all their own.

Each saw the wonder of it reflected in the other's eyes as their glances met at last.

"And y-yet I feel," said Jean, a little breathlessly, "as if we'd stepped onto a

roller coaster or a merry-go-round. We can't get off now, you know. We've got to keep on going with it."

Richard's smile was a trifle grim.

"We'll keep on going," he predicted. "We must."

For they both realized quite to the full, in spite of the contrary belief of their families, the risk of their matrimonial venture. Indeed, had Richard's father known, as his son knew, that their total cash on hand amounted to precisely fifty dollars, twenty-five of which was in his savings account and twenty-five in his checking, he would have passed even a more uneasy night than he actually did, contemplating his son's folly. And had Jean's mother known of the allowance upon which her daughter was planning to conduct her culinary department, she would certainly have insisted upon a daily contribution from her own bountiful larder, which would as surely have been returned with appreciation and thanks. It was to be a fight, as Richard and Jean were well aware, an uphill, independent, sacrificial fight, requiring absolute coöperation and teamwork—and they were quite calmly determined to win.

That first supper together was worth all the misgivings of their great venture. Very true, the mere bread, butter, cream, and fruit which Richard went out and bought at a near-by delicatessen cut a jagged hole in Jean's first daily allowance. Very true, when they invaded their newly stocked pantry and chose from its shelves a can of sardines, and opened the package of tea, and dug into the bin of priceless sugar to fill the sugar bowl for the first time, they felt as if they were robbing their own safety-deposit vault. Very true, when Jean lit her gas stove, she could have sworn that she distinctly heard each click of the meter down in the basement as it registered their folly in cold dollars and cents. What of

that? Jean had arranged her choicest dolly set on their own table, and Richard was laying the two places side by side with the new wedding silver, filling their own tumblers with cold water from their own shiny kitchen faucets, and setting the table with their own glistening china. Jean wore one of her brand-new kitchen aprons and Richard wore another, and the flavor of that meal might well have stirred the envy of many a famous French chef.

During that first month, the entire value of money changed in their eyes. Pennies turned to gold, lowly nickels asserted a sudden claim to recognition, dimes came to be regarded as vastly more precious than material for scattered tips, and quarters were to be reckoned with gravely and seriously. It was strange how much larger they looked than in the old days. They had started in their housekeeping with a budget system, a budget which, it must be confessed, was very nearly consumed by the time it was distributed among the rent, the two allowances, the payment on the loan to Uncle Frank, the laundry, gas, electricity—and the incidentals! Those incidentals! How they could assemble in battle array! A wedding present, a "bit" for the Belgian children, a broken mainspring in Richard's watch! A thousand surprises, discouragements, shocks, misgivings assailed them during that first experimental month.

October 1st arrived. The monthly bills came in, the bank statement. They cleared their dining-room table and attacked their accounts with their jaws set. Jean watched breathlessly while Richard checked up and added and figured.

He held the completed result up triumphantly before his wife's eyes.

"Fifteen dollars! Wonderful!" Jean exclaimed in a tone of awe. "Have we really saved fifteen dollars this one month?"

"Fifteen to the good," confirmed Richard in relief. "It's small enough, Heaven knows, but it's better than fifteen to the bad, anyhow."

"Oh, nothing can stop us now!" Jean cried in a thrill of inspiration. "I knew we could do it, Richard, didn't you? I knew we could do it! Nothing can stop us now!"

Richard laughed boyishly and excitedly, catching Jean's enthusiasm.

"Well, they'll have to go some if they overtake us," he admitted, taking pride in his boast.

The golden brown of Indian summer was one day flecked with a few siftings of early snow. November came, and December, and Christmas, a white, holy sort of Christmas Day with the families together, unbroken, and Richard and Jean silent with happiness, awed by the utter contentment which love and work and success can bring. The music of the Christmas bells, the poignant joy of Christmas carols would always bring back to them, perhaps some day with pain, the completeness of that one rich day when life left nothing to be desired save further opportunities to work.

They still continued to gain a little each month, sometimes very little, often more. Richard was called for jury service, which helped. He served on an election board, and there were fortunately a copious number of elections that fall. Jean was offered several pupils to tutor in French, which she joyfully accepted. She was helping, too. And business was good. There was a bonus check in January which Jean, in her delight, carried to her lips and kissed—and how Richard laughed at her! But he kissed her, too, when she grew so rosy red, and then they did a fox trot all around the house to celebrate.

The column in their budget sheet allotted to recreations was slighted woe-fully that winter. Theaters were too

expensive; trips—except for short, week-end visits to friends—quite out of the question; concerts, even, strictly tabooed. For their music, they listened hungrily to other people's Victrolas; for their festivities, they went to a few dances and played bridge and entertained very simply the round of their best friends; for travel, they invested a few dollars in some of the best magazines and patronized lavishly a near-by library.

Of all their pastimes, those evenings seemed the happiest and best spent in which they alternately read aloud, Jean while Richard smoked, Richard while Jean sewed or crocheted or worked on Christmas gifts, sitting side by side in front of their fireplace under their big lamp, while the winter wind outside drove the stinging sleet against their windowpanes or howled in baffled rage to find its entrance blocked in the big chimney. Novels they read and much late poetry, biography, books on travel, and everything upon which they could lay their hands regarding the Great War—the weekly magazines, with their topics of the day and foreign comment, articles by the military experts, the war maps, and all the latest war books presenting the viewpoints of France and England and Germany.

Sometimes, as they finished a particularly pessimistic article or closed an unusually searching book, they would sit silent, gazing at the embers, until the bitter wind bombarding now this angle, now that, of their frail house grew to bear a strange resemblance to that greater horror, drawing ever closer and closer, encompassing their country about, too, with its bloody fingers. Would it ever enter quite into their sheltered home as it had entered and shattered the homes of Belgium, of France? Could a terror so remote find its way across the sea, the great, dividing sea, and shell their content and happiness as it had shelled and devas-

tated the love and quiet of so many peaceful English homes?

The government forecaster announced one late February morning that the "backbone" of winter was broken. The weather grew damp and raw instead of bitter and bracing and, with the first hint of spring, a strange, vibrant realization of a new marvel and a new responsibility came to them. Jean was a little frightened at the thought of it, Richard suddenly stern with the gravity of the new expenses to be met. But after the first agitation, the thrill of the new joy in store stirred them both to redoubled effort.

"One thing more to work for," declared Richard gravely and with a deeper note in his voice.

"You're sure we can—pay for everything?" faltered Jean.

Richard, holding her close, merely laughed in her ear.

Spring came fast, tumbling over itself in its haste to rout retreating winter. It arrived barefooted before the snow had left the ground, filling the trees boldly with early robins and bluebirds and joking, taunting jays. Violets came up on faith and were not betrayed, and spring beauties stirred bravely to life with the courage that marked the onrush of the season.

But within the white-and-yellow cottage a sudden catastrophe had occurred. Jean fell sick, desperately, dangerously sick. There was a hurried consultation of doctors and mothers and Richard; and before they realized quite what had happened, Jean lay in the hospital, faint and weak and crushed, the savings of the winter, hastily transferred to the checking account, were pouring out insanely to cover the emergency expenses, and the dream had vanished away.

The room was still reeking with ether, the miserable taste of it still in the far corners of Jean's lungs from which she was as yet too tired to

breathe deeply enough to expel it, when she looked up at Richard, with tears filling her eyes. They were alone for a few minutes.

"Everything's gone," said Jean. "The baby—and all our money. Will we have any money left?"

"Plenty," Richard, kneeling by her bed, assured her. "More, at least, than when we were married. Besides, you know we were saving up our money for a rainy day, so if this is the rainy day, why, this is what we've been saving our money for. Isn't that true, dear?"

She smiled very faintly at Richard's logic.

"Even this can't stop us, you know," reminded Richard, stroking her hand. "The dream will come true some day. I asked the doctor. And we can earn the money all back again. Aren't we glad now that we had it saved?"

She essayed one of her old, comical smiles, which fell just enough short of success almost to spoil Richard's bravado.

"You plucky old thing!" she murmured. "I—I would be, too, if I weren't so—so tired."

"You go to sleep, then, and rest," Richard commanded, "and I'll sit here and wish pluck back into you again."

Indeed, they "came back," a credit to the true American spirit, not to be beaten; instead, to start all over again with a determination grimmer than before, with an energy redoubled. Slowly Jean's strength returned, and with it she made the curious discovery that all she could remember of the pain was the grasp of Richard's strong arms holding her close, all that remained of the discouragements was the reviving tonic of Richard's unshaken faith; and for the priceless memory of these, she would gladly have suffered it all again.

Richard's predictions again came true. They were far from penniless when they came to check up their shat-

tered accounts. It had not been as bad as they had feared, and they would start in to win it all back.

"Of course we can," Jean agreed, in answer to Richard's quizzical question. "Nothing can stop us. We did it once, and we can do it again. Nothing can stop us this time, either."

Nothing?

That grim monster from overseas was stretching his fingers closer, ever closer, twitching with the desire to clutch American safety and happiness by the throat and throttle it, as he had seized jealously and now held in a death grip the happiness of Europe. War was declared, and from the first vague rumors when people were predicting that no American armies would be sent over, developed the stern realities of feverish midsummer—the registration, the first call of the drafted men, the establishment of new training camps. And long before either one mentioned it to the other, Richard and Jean knew that Richard, who was twenty-eight, would not claim exemption, knew, even, that he would enlist before he was actually called, knew that the yellow-and-white cottage would be for rent again at the end of their year's lease, the goods stored, and that Jean would go back home to live until "after the war"—and perhaps longer. Therefore, when the subject was opened up at last, they were both very quiet about it.

"I'm going to try to get that position that was offered me last year in the high school," announced Jean, who had married fresh from college and given up a career for domesticity. "Of course I should never let father support me again."

"I think I'll enter the second training camp," offered Richard in his turn. "It'll open just about the time our lease is up."

There fell a long silence.

"It's curious," observed Jean finally,

"how calmly we take it, isn't it? A year ago—three months ago, even—we would absolutely have caved in at the thought of separating from each other and giving up our house and home."

"It's because our sacrifice seems so small compared with the heroism of Belgium and France and England and the others," answered Richard.

"And yet," argued Jean, "ours takes courage, too. Belgium, France, even England had to rise up or be overwhelmed. And even then some of them were. But you and I break up our home in cold blood, deliberately, here in the peaceful sunshine, and you go miles and miles and miles to fight for a cause so remote——"

"Yet is it so remote?" put in Richard.

"It takes a different sort of courage," he admitted after a long pause, "a sort of American courage. One has to keep the ideal firmly in mind or it all grows remote and improbable."

Then, after the long silences which fell during such discussions, the conversation would grow more intimate.

"You must never, never write me that you miss me, you know!" Richard would exclaim in a sort of desperation as he snapped on the light for one of their last evenings together. "I don't want any one writing me stuff that will make me homesick. Write me the craziest nonsense you can think of. And never mention this house, Jean. Never! You understand?"

"Certainly not," agreed Jean warmly. Then with feminine inconsistency, "But you will to me, won't you, Richard? And tell me that you still love me and that you wish we were back here?"

That was, to Jean, the hardest part. It had been glorious to fight and work

together for a year. Together! But now the fight, and even a harder one, must go on alone, individually. Each one must keep from the other, instead of sharing, the worries and discouragements and heartaches.

"We thought," observed Jean one day in the midst of packing, "we thought, last fall at this time, that we were having it terribly hard——"

"——marrying on 'little but love,'" supplemented Richard, understanding her wholly.

"Yes," Jean agreed.

But the inference of the observation remained unspoken by either.

The goods were packed and stored at last and the cottage stood empty once more, the mellow September sun dropping behind it over the wooded ridge as it had just a year ago on that wonderful day when they had come home to take possession. The long, slantwise rays lingered almost wonderingly in their search across the bare windows, the deserted porches, and lit up rather cruelly the hollowness within.

Such a year to remember! Each one was thinking secretly of that as they turned back together for a last look, each yearning thankfully over the memories that no one could ever steal away from them. But neither one dared trust such sentiments, at this most critical moment, to actual utterance.

"You're sure you have both keys to the front door?" Richard asked again, clearing his throat loudly.

"Both of them," stoutly answered Jean, with a new harsh note in her voice, where she was pressing down resolutely on the dangerous lump: "I'll take them down and turn them in the first thing in the morning."



Skin Blemishes

By Doctor Lillian Whitney

Dr. Whitney is always glad to answer all reasonable questions relating to beauty and health, but she cannot undertake to answer letters which fail to inclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for reply, or to letters inclosing Canadian stamps. Every week she receives many letters of this sort, in spite of the notice always printed at the end of this department. Sometimes, even, the post office sends notification that letters are being held for her, which careless writers have posted with no stamp. If you have failed to receive a reply to your letter, you may know that it is for one of these three reasons.—EDITORS.

NO attraction of form or feature will outweigh a skin that is conspicuous for its blemishes, no matter what the character of these may be. In warm weather, an oily skin is doubly active, and the risk of blackheads and pimples is thereby the greater. Blackheads or comedo is preeminently a disorder of the oil glands, being characterized by blackish or yellowish pin-point elevations at the site of the glandular mouths or pores. Very often blackheads are associated with oily dandruff of the skin, in which case it presents a greasy appearance.

Unless the skin is exceedingly fine in texture and healthy in tone, blackheads are very common, because they result from an accumulation of soil and bacteria in the pores of an oily skin. These blemishes are not flesh worms, as is popularly believed, although a small parasite has been found in the oily mass. Some skin specialists now believe a chemical change in the sebaceous matter causes the black points.

The character of the skin is powerfully influenced by systemic conditions. Profound changes at puberty, when blemishes first begin to appear, have much to do with these disorders. Indigestion, constipation, anæmia, an inherent lack of tone in the skin, the use of cheap soap, dusty atmosphere, carelessness in the toilet of the skin, the

early and overuse of cosmetics, all contribute their share to the development of blackheads and other blemishes, which, while trivial in themselves, may alter or change the course and "conduct" of one's entire life.

Local measures must be reinforced with vigorous constitutional treatment. Constipation especially must be combated and indigestion overcome by means of suitable fare, exercises, deep breathing, and so on.

For blackheads of mild degree, a hot lotion containing pure powdered borax, one-half ounce; soda, two ounces; and hot water, applied with thick towels for fifteen to twenty minutes, usually proves efficacious in dissolving the little masses. The skin should then be bathed with pure soap and warm water, followed by dashes of cold water; and finally there should be applications of a soothing emollient or bland oil. A strong lotion for this purpose in conditions that have resisted treatment consists of pure brandy, two ounces; cologne, one ounce; liquor of potassa, one-half ounce. This should be applied after the face has been thoroughly washed with hot water and soap.

No attempt should be made to remove individual blackheads before the skin has been thoroughly softened. Otherwise, it is sure to bruise. Hot water and a bland soap, followed by

inunctions of olive, cotton seed, or corn oil, will greatly facilitate the work. If then a comedo extractor be applied directly over the mouth of the "grub," gentle pressure will be sufficient to draw it out. This leaves an enlarged pore, and for that reason an astringent wash must always be used, to contract the skin and close the opening.

Now blackheads lead to pimples, and pimples lead to that most distressing of all facial blemishes—"acne." When carefully treated, blackheads should not develop into pimples, but the two are usually associated. Pimples yield to appropriate measures if the tone of the skin is healthy. Beside the systematic daily employment of cold water, the faradic current is sometimes useful for this purpose; also weak applications of high-frequency currents.

An ordinary pimple is a small inflamed spot upon the site of a blackhead or blocked-up sebaceous gland. A simple camphor lotion, daubed on the spot as soon as it appears, may be all the treatment required. A dram of spirits of camphor and one of glycerin to four ounces of rose water makes a nice lotion. When sulphur is well borne, a dram of sulphur precipitate may be added to this mixture, if stronger treatment is required. Applications of carbolized-zinc ointment are often extremely efficacious, but when pimples develop into acne lesions, the condition tends to become chronic, one crop barely disappearing before another takes its place, and, while located as a rule only upon the face, the lesions may spread over the neck, shoulders, back, and chest.

There are several varieties of acne. One seldom sees only one type in a given case, the most common form being mixed, the several kinds of lesions in all stages of evolution and decline being present in a single case. The disease is essentially one of adolescence and the early-adult years, persisting,

with more or less variation, for years and tending to spontaneous disappearance at thirty, sometimes even later.

There is an artificial variety of acne produced by certain drugs such as the bromides and iodides. Tar used externally may develop an eruption called *tar acne*. Genuine lesions are very apt to develop upon a skin in which the oil glands are unduly active, the admixture of decomposed (acid) sebaceous matter with pus germs exciting an inflammation. In almost all cases of severe and continued acne, constipation and anæmia exist.

It is plain, then, that all these predisposing causes must be removed in order to combat the disease in its incipient stages. This requires greater mental discipline than most young people care to cultivate; otherwise acne would not be so common.

The digestion must be strengthened by confining the diet to plain, easily assimilable fare of such a character as makes blood, that any existing anæmia may at the same time be overcome. Systematic exercise in the fresh air must be insisted upon, with daily cold bathings to tone the nerves and muscles, especially cold-water facial applications; and last—which should also be first—cleansing all channels of the body with laxatives and flushings of water.

Iron is of advantage in some cases, while cod-liver oil is a remedy of great value in strenuous and debilitated subjects. Acne proves rebellious in many instances because the lesions, and not the individual, are treated; also because the long-suffering victim grows discouraged and careless, neglecting rigid daily hygiene and curative measures. Haphazard and slipshod methods in this, as in every other undertaking, get one nowhere. One reason why physicians are as a rule unsuccessful in checking acne is because the patient "falls down" on the hygienic measures that lie at the root of all treatment.

No local remedies will prove effectual if the following suggestions are not rigidly carried out: systematic dieting, daily bathing, daily bowel evacuations, out-of-door exercise—walking, fresh-air breathing—sufficient sleep in a well-ventilated room, and a blood tonic when needed. Specific local treatment to suit individual needs will be mailed on application.

Severe acne is called furunculosis, and it is in this type that quite extensive scarring of the tissues occurs. Large sore acne lesions are really boils. Boils or furuncles are caused by an acute inflammation of a hair follicle with its sebaceous (oil) gland and the connecting tissues immediately surrounding them. It is a local process due to an infection through the hair follicle by pus-producing organisms.

Furunculosis of a general nature—that is, a breaking out of boils over different parts or the entire body—springs from a state of lowered vitality and very often occurs during convalescence from infectious diseases, especially typhoid fever. When boils appear in crops, or recur constantly, the urine should be examined for sugar, as this is a common event in diabetes. A carbuncle is similar, although larger and more serious.

A predisposition to furuncular outbreaks exists in some persons, indeed, to such an extent that slight irritation of the skin may lead to an attack. Men so disposed should avoid wearing stiffly starched collars with razor edges, and should avoid allowing the dark cloth or velvet collars of their coats to rub the skin, as these always harbor myriads of bacteria. They should also forbear shaving, as well as clipping too closely the hair upon the back of the neck. Have it trimmed reasonably short, and wear moderately stiff or soft collars. Upon the appearance of a boil in this situation, immediate measures to abort it often prove highly successful. That

a boil should be poulticed and coaxed to come to a head is obsolete treatment today. Compression, in the formative stage, may check the development. A touch of lunar caustic on the head of a boil may cause it to disappear. A wash of equal parts of iodine, tincture of arnica, and camphorated alcohol may prevent the formation of new boils.

Another abortive treatment giving fair results consists in covering the affected area freely with collodion containing from one-half to two grains of salicylic acid to the dram. Repeat the applications two or three times in twelve hours. The application of electricity to the parts, after painting freely with colorless tincture of iodine, often meets with miraculous results and is a particularly happy form of treating a boil upon the face.

When all methods at abortion prove futile, the following treatment is said to be far superior to poulticing. A piece of soft linen or borated gauze is smeared on one side with vaseline, over which chloroform is poured. This is quickly applied to the unopened boil or carbuncle, a bandage being placed over all. It smarts a little at first, but this is soon succeeded by a pleasing cool sensation. The cloth is frequently changed. In from two hours to one day, the boil, no matter how hard or painful, softens and opens.

Urticaria or hives, commonly called "nettle rash," is a common skin affection at this season of the year, when it is usually caused by the ingestion of sea food, berries, mushrooms, buttermilk, or any article of diet to which the system is unaccustomed or which it will not tolerate. A form of itching pimple that appears and disappears in a capricious manner, never lasting very long, rarely, though sometimes, coming to a head, is of this order. White, pinkish, or reddish eruptions break out on the face, while true urticaria appears as a wheal and may blister, accom-

panied by itching, burning, stinging, or prickly sensations. The treatment consists of clearing the intestinal tract of all offending matter with a dose of castor oil and the internal administration of cooling drinks, such as lemonade or other fruit juices. In obstinate cases, the following meets with happy results:

Sulphate of magnesia	½ ounce
Sulphate of iron	12 grains
Dilute sulphuric acid	1 dram
Water enough to make	3 ounces

Of this solution, two teaspoonfuls should be taken three times a day, in plenty of water, through a tube or straw, and the teeth should be cleansed afterward. Children can be given this mixture in half doses.

Locally, strong vinegar and water, carbolized-zinc ointment, or a lotion containing phenol, one-half dram; alcohol, four drams; camphor water, six ounces, will allay the itching and irritation of the skin.

Foods that have a tendency to cause these eruptions should be eliminated from the diet, and the nerves of the skin *stabilized* with daily salt-water rubbing, for that form of urticaria in which blisters and localized swellings occur is probably an affection of the vaso-motor nerves.

Scars and pits that result from chronic skin eruptions constitute a serious blemish that may become so disfiguring as completely to alter the features. Home remedies are scarcely indicated in such cases. The most successful treatment now is by means of light rays. Color and light therapy for the alleviation and cure of skin troubles is still in its infancy; but so many marvelous things are being done in this field that the future is full of promise.

Pigmentation of any description mars the finest skin. Discolorations are often caused by cosmetics and drugs, but

more frequently by intestinal auto-intoxication and sluggishness of the liver.

The war has increased the cost of chemicals to such an extent that the poorest substitutes, poisonous dyes, and cheap synthetic compounds are being employed in the manufacture of toilet preparations. Within the last few months, the public has been warned against the use of these by the United States government. It is expedient, especially at the present time, to make up one's own cosmetics and so run no risks of poisoning.

Freckles and liver spots can be guarded against to a certain extent by protecting the skin from sun and wind and by stimulating the liver and intestinal tract with greens and olive oil. Mild caustics, applied locally, will usually remove these superficial blemishes if mopped upon the surface every day. The following is a good bleach for this purpose:

Chloride of ammonia	1 dram
Commercially pure hydrochloric acid	10 drops
Distilled witch hazel	3 ounces
Rose water	3 ounces

Mix and apply with a sponge once or twice a day.

What greater skin blemish of an innocuous nature exists than superfluous hair? Electrolysis is the only absolute cure, as it alone destroys the hair follicles. The government is cautioning the public against the use of depilatories particularly, as cheap caustics are especially dangerous and unsafe in inexperienced hands. We are returning to primitive methods in so many things to-day that the employment of rather crude means for the destruction of superfluous hair is again coming to the fore. What are these? Further data will be furnished readers on personal application.

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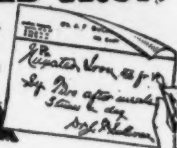
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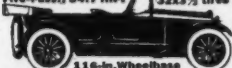
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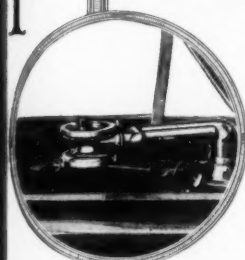
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